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# THE DAY WILL COME

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "VIXEN," "ISHMAEL,"
"LIKE AND UNLIKE," "THE FATAL THREE,"
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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# THE DAY WILL COME.

## CHAPTER I.

"Thou takest not away, O Death?
Thou strikest—absence perisheth,
Indifference is no more;
The future brightens on our sight;
For on the past hath fallen a light
That tempts us to adore."

WHILE Juanita clung with feverish intensity to the hope of discovering her husband's murderer Lord Cheriton seemed to be gradually resigning himself to the idea that the crime would go to swell the long list of undiscovered murders which he could recall within his own experience of life—crimes which had kept society expectant and on the alert for a month, and which had stimulated the police to unwonted exertions, finally to fade into oblivion, or to be occasionally cited as an example of the mysteriousness of human history.

He had offered a large reward, he had brought all his own trained intelligence to bear upon the subject; he had thought and brooded upon it by day and by night; and the result had been nil. A hand had been stretched out of the darkness to slay an unoffending young man, in whose life his daughter's happiness had been bound up. That was the whole history of the murder. A shot heard in the night, a bullet fired out of the darkness with fatal aim.

Not one indication, not one suggestive fact had been discovered since the night of the murder.

"It is hopeless," said Lord Cheriton, talking over the calamity with Mr. Scarsdale, the Vicar of Cheriton and Testwick, adjoining parishes; "the crime and the motive of the crime are alike inscrutable. If one could imagine a reason for the act it might be easier to get upon the track of the murderer; but there is no reason that I can conceive for such a deed. It has been suggested to me that Sir Godfrey might have had a secret enemy—that his life might not have been as spotless as we think——"

"I will answer for it that he was never guilty of a dishonourable action, that he provoked no man's

hatred by any unworthy act," interrupted the Vicar warmly.

He had been curate at Millbrook before he got the Cheriton living, and had lived for two years at the Priory while he prepared Godfrey Carmichael for Eton, so he claimed the right to vouch for the honour of the dead.

"There never was a whiter soul in mortal clay," said the Vicar.

"I am inclined to estimate his character almost as highly as you," replied Lord Cheriton, deliberately, "yet the straightest walker may make one false step—and there may have been some unfortunate entanglement at the University or in London——"

"I will never believe it. He may have been tempted—he may have yielded to temptation—but if he erred, be sure he atoned for his error to the uttermost of his power."

"There are errors—seeming light to the steps that stumble—which cannot be atoned for."

"There was no such error in his youth. I looked in his face on his wedding day, Lord Cheriton, and it was the face of a man of unblemished

life—a man who need fear no ghost out of the dead past."

"Well, you are right, I believe—and in that case the murder is motiveless—the murder of a madman—a madman so profoundly artful in his lunacy as to escape every eye. By heaven, I wish we had the old way of hunting such a quarry—and that a leash of bloodhounds could have been set loose upon his track within an hour of the murder. *They* would have hunted him down—*their* instinct would have found him skulking and shivering in his lair; and we should have needed no astute detective primed with all the traditions of Scotland Yard. It would have been swift, sudden justice—blood for blood."

His dark grey eyes shone with an angry light as he walked up and down the spacious floor of the library, while the Vicar stood in front of the fire, looking gravely into his clerical hat, and without any suggestion to offer.

"I hope Lady Carmichael is recovering her spirits," he said feebly, after a pause.

"She is not any happier than she was when her loss was a week old; but she keeps up in a wonderful way. I believe she is sustained by some wild

notion that the murderer will be found—that she will live to see her husband's death avenged. I doubt if at present she has any other interest in life."

"But let us hope she will be cheered by the society of her husband's people. I hear that the Morningsides and the Grenvilles are to be at the Priory in November."

"Indeed! I have heard nothing about it."

"I was at Swanage yesterday afternoon, and took tea with Lady Jane. She was full of praises of Lady Carmichael's goodness, and her desire that all things at the Priory might be just as they had been in Sir Godfrey's lifetime. His brothers-in-law used to be invited for the shooting in November, and they were to be invited this year, on condition that Lady Jane would help to entertain them, and Lady Jane has consented gladly. So there will be a large family party at the Priory on this side of Christmas," concluded the Vicar.

"I am glad to hear it," said Lord Cheriton. "Anything is better for her than solitude; any occupation, if it be only revising a bill of fare, or listening to feminine twaddle, is better for her than idleness."

"Yes, there will be a houseful," pursued the Vicar; "Mrs. Grenville takes her nursery with her wherever she goes."

"And Mrs. Morningside is delighted to leave hers behind her."

"Yes, she is one of those mothers who are always telling people what paragons of nurses Providence has provided for their darlings, or how admirably their children are being brought up by a model governess," said the Vicar, who was severe upon other people's neglect of duty. "By the bye, talking of mothers, I believe I saw Mrs. Porter's daughter the other day while I was in town."

"You *believe* you saw her?"

"Yes, I am not certain. A face flashed past me in the street one night, and when the face was gone it came upon me that it was Mercy Porter's eyes that looked at me for an instant in the gaslight. I was in a busy thoroughfare on the Surrey side of Westminster Bridge. I had been to hear Vansittart preach a mission sermon at a church near Walworth, and I was walking back to the West End. It was late on a Saturday night, and the road was full of costermongers' barrows, and the pavement was

crowded with working people doing their marketing. I tried to overtake the girl whose face had startled me, but it was no use. She had melted into the crowd. I went back the whole length of the street, hoping I might find her in front of one of the costers' stalls; but she must have turned into one of the numerous side streets, and it was hopeless to hunt for her there. Yet I should have been very glad to get hold of her."

"Is she much changed?"

"Changed! Yes. It was only the ghost of Mercy Porter that I saw. I should not have known her but for her eyes. She had fine eyes, do you remember, and with a great deal of expression in them. I think I should be safe in swearing to Mercy Porter's eyes."

"Did she look poor or ill?"

"She looked both—but the illness might be only hunger. She had that wan pinched look one sees in the faces of the London poor, especially in the women's faces."

"Have you told her mother?"

"No, I came to the conclusion that it would be giving the poor soul useless pain to tell her any-

thing, having so little to tell. She knew years ago that Colonel Tremaine had deserted his victim, and that the girl had dropped through. God knows where: into the abyss that swallows up handsome young women who begin their career in West End lodgings and a hired brougham. If the mother were to go in quest of her, and bring her home here, it might be only to bring shame and misery upon her declining years. The creature may have fallen too low for the possibility of reformation, and the mother's last hours might be darkened by her sin. I would do much to rescue her—but I would rather try to save her through a stranger's help than by the mother's intervention."

Lord Cheriton continued his pacing to and fro, and did not appear particularly interested in the case of Mercy Porter. He had been much troubled by her flight from Cheriton, for the seducer was his own familiar friend, and he had felt himself in somewise to blame for having brought such a man to Cheriton. He told himself that he would not have had Tremaine inside his house had his own daughter been out of the schoolroom; and yet he had allowed the man to cross the path of the widow's only child, and

to bring desolation and sorrow upon the woman whose life he had in somewise taken under his protection.

"There are people whose mission it is to hunt out that kind of misery," he said, after an interval of silence. "I hope one of those good women will rescue Mercy Porter. I think you have been wise in saying nothing to the mother. She has got over her trouble, and anything she might hear about the girl would only be a reopening of old wounds."

"She is a wonderful woman," replied the vicar; "I never saw such grief as hers when the girl ran away; and yet within a few months she had calmed down into the placid personage she has been ever since. She is a woman of very powerful mind. I sometimes wonder that even at her age she can content herself with the monotonous life she leads in that cottage."

"Oh, she likes the place, I believe, and the life suits her," said Lord Cheriton, carelessly. "She had seen a good deal of trouble before she came here, and this was a quiet haven for her after the storms of life. I am very sorry the daughter went wrong," he added, with a sudden cloud upon his

face. "*That* was a bitter blow; and I shall never forgive myself for having brought that scoundrel Tremaine here."

"He is dead, is he not?"

"Yes, he was killed in Afghanistan six years ago. He was a good soldier though he was a bad man. I daresay he made his being ordered off to India an excuse for leaving Mercy—left her with a trifle of money perhaps, and a promise of further remittances, and then let her drift. I told my lawyer to keep his eye upon her, if possible, and to establish her in some respectable calling if ever he saw the chance of doing so; but she eluded him somehow, as you know."

"Yes, you told me what you had done. It was like you to think even of so remote a claim upon your generosity."

"Oh, she belonged to Cheriton. I have cultivated the patriarchal feeling as much as I can. All who live upon my land are under my protection."

"Lady Cheriton has been a good friend to Mrs. Porter too."

"My wife is always kind."

Juanita accepted her cousin's account of what he had heard and read at St. Helliers, as the closing of his researches in the history of the Strangways. The sister's death in a shabby exile remained to be traced; but there was no light to be expected there; and Juanita felt that she must now submit to surrender her superstition about that evil race. It was not from them the blow had come. The murderer had to be hunted for in a wider range, and the quest would be more difficult than she had thought. She was not the less intent upon discovery because of this difficulty.

"I have all my life before me," she told herself, "and I have nothing to live for but to see his murderer punished."

It had been Juanita's especial desire that the Morningsides and the Grenvilles should be invited to the Priory just as they had been in Sir Godfrey's lifetime—that all the habits of the household should be as he had willed them when his bodily presence was there among them, as he was now in the spirit, to Juanita's imagination. She thought of him every hour of the day, and in all things deferred to his opinions and ideas, shaping the whole course of

her life to please him who was lying in that dark resting-place where there is neither pain nor pleasure.

When November came, however, and with it the troop of Grenvilles, nurses and nursery governess, and the Morningsides with valet and maid, it seemed to Juanita as if the wild companions of Comus or a contingent from Bedlam had invaded the sober old Priory. Those loud voices in the hall, that perpetual running up and down and talking and laughing upon the staircase; the everlasting opening and shutting of doors; the roll of carriage-wheels driving up to the door a dozen times in a day; the bustle and fuss and commotion which two cheerful families in rude health can contrive to make in a house where they feel themselves perfectly at home—all these things were agonizing to the mourner who had lived in silence and shadow from the hour of her loss until now. Happily, however, Lady Jane was there to take all the burden off those weary shoulders; and Lady Jane in the character of a grandmother was in her very fittest sphere. Between her ladyship and the housekeeper all arrangements were made, and every detail was attended to

without inflicting the slightest trouble upon Juanita.

"You shall see just as little of them all as you like, dear," said Lady Jane. "You can breakfast and lunch in your morning room, and just come down to dinner when you feel equal to being with us, and then you will see the darlings at dessert. I know *they* will cheer you, with their pretty little ways. Such loving pets as they are too, and so full of intelligence. Did I tell you what Johnnie said yesterday at lunch?"

"Yes, dear Lady Jane, you did tell me. It was very funny," replied Juanita, with a faint smile.

She could not tell that adoring grandmother that the children were a burden to her, and that those intelligent speeches and delightful mispronunciations of polysyllabic words which convulsed parents and grandparent seemed to add perceptibly to her own gloom. She pretended to be interested in Tom's letter from Eton with a modest request for a large hamper, and she made a martyr of herself by showing Susie picture-books, and explaining the pictures, or by telling Lucy her favourite Hans Andersen story, which never palled upon that young listener.

"Don't you think you would like a new one?" Juanita would ask.

"No, no, not a new one—the same, please. I want 'The Proud Darning Needle.'"

So the adventures of "The Proud Darning Needle" had to be read or related as the case might be.

Juanita took Lady Jane's advice and spent the greater part of every day in her morning-room, that room which had been Godfrey's den. It was further from the staircase than any other sitting-room, and the clatter and the shrill voices were somewhat modified by distance. The house-party amused themselves after their hearts' desire, and worked the horses with the true metropolitan feeling that a horse is an animal designed for locomotion, and that he can't have too much of it. Lady Jane was the most indulgent of deputy hostesses, and spent all breakfast time in cutting sandwiches of a particularly dainty kind for her sons-in-law, so that they might be sustained between the luxurious home breakfast at nine, and the copious luncheon with which the cart met the shooters by appointment at half-past one. When the shooters had started there were the

little Grenvilles to slave for; and Lady Jane spent another half-hour in seeing them off upon their morning constitutional, Lucy on her Shetland, and Johnnie, Susie, and Godolphin on their short little legs, with groom and nurses in attendance. There were so many wraps to be adjusted, so many injunctions to be given to nurses and groom, so many little pockets to be filled with gingerbreads and queen-cakes, while Mrs. Grenville looked on, and protested against grandmamma's infraction of hygienic rules. Dr. Dobson Drooce had said they must *never* eat between meals.

Juanita rarely appeared before afternoon tea, when she was generally installed in her own particular easy chair by the fire, fenced round by a seven-leaved Indian screen, which was big enough to include a couple of small tables and a creepie stool, before the sisters-in-law came in from their afternoon drive, or the shooters dropped in after their day in the woods. There were no other guests than the sisters and their husbands; and it was an understood thing that no one else should be asked, unless it were Lord and Lady Cheriton, the Dalbrooks from Dorchester, or Mr. Scarsdale.

No one could have been sweeter than the young widow was to her visitors during the hours she spent with them, listening with inexhaustible patience to Jessica Grenville's graphic account of the measles as lately "taken" by her whole brood, with all the after consequences of the malady, and the amount of cod-liver oil and quinine consumed by each patient; pretending to be interested in Ruth Morningside's perpetual disquisitions upon smart people and smart people's frocks; and in every way performing her duty as a hostess.

And yet George Grenville was not altogether satisfied.

"I'll tell you what it is, Jess," he said to his wife one night, in the luxurious privacy of the good old-fashioned bedroom, seated on the capacious sofa in front of the monumental four-poster, with elaborately-turned columns, richly-moulded cornice, and heavy damask curtains; the kind of bedstead for which our ancestors gave fifty guineas, and for which no modern auctioneer can obtain a bid of fifty shillings; "I'll tell you what it is, Jess," repeated Mr. Grenville, frowning at the fire, "either your brother's widow gives herself

confounded airs, or there is something in the wind."

"I'm afraid so, George," replied his wife, meekly.

"You're afraid of what? Why the deuce can't you be coherent? Afraid of her airs——"

"I'm afraid there is—something in the wind," faltered the submissive lady. "I suppose it's the best thing that could happen to her, poor girl, for a nursery will be an occupation for her mind, and prevent her brooding on her loss; but this place would have been very nice for Tom all the same."

"I should think it would indeed, and he ought not to be swindled out of it," said Mr. Grenville, with a disgusted air. "I—I am surprised at your sister-in-law! I have always considered that there is a kind of indelicacy in a posthumous child. It may be a prejudice on my part, but I have always felt a sort of revulsion when I have heard of such creatures," and Mr. Grenville curled his lordly aquiline nose, and made a wry face at the jovial fire, blazing hospitably, heaped high with coals and wood, and roaring up towards the frosty sky.

## CHAPTER II.

"Then through my brain the thought did pass,
Even as a flash of lightning there,
That there was something in her air,
Which would not doom me to despair;
And on the thought my words broke forth."

Harrington Dalbrook was as keenly impressed with a sense of stupendous self-sacrifice in giving up his prospects in the Church as if the Primacy had only been a question of time; yet as his Divinity examination had twice ended in disappointment and a shame-faced return to the paternal roof-tree, it might be thought that, in his friend Sir Henry Baldwin's phraseology, he was very well out of it. Sir Henry was the average young man of the epoch, sharp, shallow, and with a strong belief in his own superiority to the human race in general, and naturally to a friend whose father plodded over leases and agreements in an old-fashioned office in a country town; but the two young men happened to have been thrown together at Oxford, where Sir Henry

was at Christ Church while Harrington Dalbrook was at New; and as Sir Henry's ancestral home was within six miles of Dorchester, the friendship begun at the University was continued in the county town.

Sir Henry lived at a good old Georgian house called the Mount, between Dorchester and Weymouth. It was a red brick house, with a centre and two wings, a Corinthian portico of Portland stone, and a wide level lawn in front of the portico, that was brilliant with scarlet geraniums all the summer. There were no novelties in the way of gardening at the Mount, and there were never likely to be any new departures while Lady Baldwin held the reins of power. She was known in the locality as a lady of remarkable "closeness," a lady who pared down every department of expenditure to the very bone. The gardens and shrubberies were always in perfect order, neat, trim, weedless; but everything was reduced to the minimum of outlay; there were no new plants or shrubs, no specimen trees, no innovations or improvements; there was very little "glass," and there were only two gardeners to do the work in grounds for which most people would have kept four or five.

The dowager was never ashamed to allude to the smallness of her jointure or to bemoan her son's college debts. She had two daughters, the younger pale, sickly, and insignificant; the elder tall and large, with a beauty of the showy and highly-coloured order, brown eyes, a complexion of milk and roses, freely sprinkled with freckles, and light wavy hair, which in a young woman of meaner station might have been called red.

The neighbourhood was of opinion that it was time for the elder Miss Baldwin to marry, and that she ought to marry well; but that important factor in marriage, the bridegroom, was not forthcoming. It was a ground of complaint against Sir Henry that he never brought any eligible young men to the Mount.

"My mother's housekeeping would frighten them away if I did," answered Henry, when hard driven upon this point. "The young men of the present day like a good dinner. There isn't a third-rate club in London where the half-crown house dinner isn't better than the food we have here—better cooked and more plentiful."

"Perhaps, if you helped mother a little things

would be more comfortable than they are," remonstrated Laura, the younger sister, who generally took upon herself the part of Mentor. "You must know that her income isn't enough to keep up this place as it ought to be kept."

"I don't know anything of the kind. I believe she is hoarding and scraping for you two girls; but she'll find by and by that she has been penny wise and pound foolish, for nobody worth having will ever propose to Juliet in such a dismal hole as this," continued the baronet, scornfully surveying the old-fashioned furniture, which had never been vivified by modern frivolities, or made more luxurious by modern inventions.

"Juliet is not the beginning and end of our lives," replied Laura, sourly. "She has plenty of opportunities, if she were only capable of using them. I know her visiting costs a small fortune."

"A very small one," said Juliet, "I have fewer gowns than any girl I meet, and have to give smaller tips when I am leaving. The servants are hardly civil to me when I go back to a house."

"I daresay not," retorted Laura, "considering that you expect other people's maids to do more for

you than your own maid would do, if you had one."

Juliet sighed, and shrugged her graceful shoulders.

"It is all very horrid and very sordid," she said, "and I wish I were dead."

"I don't go so far as that," replied Laura, "but I wish with all my heart you were married, and that mother and I could live in peace."

All this meant that the handsome Miss Baldwin was seven-and-twenty, and that although she had drunk the cup of praise from men and women, not one eligible man with place and fortune to offer had offered himself. Eligible men had admired and had praised and had flattered, and had ridden away, like the knight of old, and had married some other girl; a girl with money generally, an American girl sometimes. Juliet Baldwin hated the very name of Columbus.

For want of some one better to flirt with, Juliet had flirted with Harrington Dalbrook. He was her junior by two years, and on his first visit to the Mount had succumbed to her beauty, and to the charm of manners which somewhat exaggerated the

progressive spirit of the smart world. Miss Baldwin was amused by her conquest, though she had no idea of allowing her acquaintance with her brother's friend to travel beyond the strictest limits of that state of things which our neighbours call "flirtage." But "flirtage" now-a-days is somewhat comprehensive; and with Juliet it went so far as to allow her admirer to gratify her with offerings of gloves and flowers for her ball-dresses, when she was staying with friends in Belgravia, and the young man was taking a holiday in London.

It may be that the fascinations of this young lady had something to do with Harrington's failure to pass his Divinity examination, and with his subsequent renunciation of the Church of England for the wider faith of the naturalist and the metaphysician. He told his family that he had got beyond Christianity as it was understood by Churchmen, and set forth in the Thirty-nine Articles. He had gone from the river to the sea, as he explained it, from the narrow banked-in river of orthodoxy to the wide ocean of the new faith—faith in humanity—faith in a universal brotherhood — faith in one's self as superior to anything else in the universe, past or

present. In this enlightened attitude he had grasped at Theodore's offer, all the more eagerly, perhaps, because he had lately heard Juliet Baldwin's emphatic declaration apropos to nothing particular—that she would never marry a parson, and that the existence of a parson's wife in town or country seemed to her of all lives the most odious.

Would she take more kindly to a lawyer, he asked himself with a sinking heart. Would a country practice, life in an old-fashioned house in an old-fashioned market-town, satisfy her ambition? He feared not. If he wanted that radiant creature for his wife, he must exchange country for town, Dorchester for Lincoln's Inn Fields, and a house in Chester Street, or at least Gloucester Place. She had been used to Belgravia; but she might perhaps tolerate the neighbourhood of Portman Square, the unaristocratic sound of Baker Street, the convenience of Atlas omnibuses, until he should be able to start his brougham.

Led on by this guiding star he told himself that what he had to do was to become learned in the law, particularly in the science, art, and mystery of conveyancing, which branch of a family practice he

believed to be at once dignified and lucrative. He had to make himself master of his profession, to make his experiments upon the inferior clay of Dorsetshire—upon farmers and small gentry—and then to persuade his father to buy him a London practice, an aristocratic London practice, such as should not call a blush to the cheek of a fashionable wife. He had met solicitors' wives who gave themselves all the airs of great ladies, and who talked as if the Bench and the Bar were set in motion and kept going by their husbands. Such a wife would Juliet be could he be so blessed as to win her.

The mild "flirtage," involving much tribute from the glover and the florist, the bookseller and the photographer, had been going on for nearly three years, and Harrington was tremendously in earnest. His sisters had encouraged him in his infatuation, thinking that it would be rather a nice thing to have a baronet as a family connection, and with a sneaking admiration for Sir Henry Baldwin's club-house manners, and slangy vocabulary, which had to be translated to them in the first instance by Harrington. They liked to be intimate with Miss Baldwin of the Mount, liked to see her smart little pony-cart

waiting for an hour in front of the door in Cornhill, while the young lady prattled about her conquests, her frocks, and her parties, over the afternoon tea-table. True that she never talked about anybody but herself, except when she depreciated a rival belle; but the background of her talk was the smart world, and that was a world of which Janet and her sister loved to hear, albeit "plain-living and high-thinking" was their motto.

Sir Henry had a small hunting stud, and somewhat ungraciously allowed his elder sister an occasional mount, although, as he took care to impress upon her, he hated hunting women. For the pleasure of being in the young lady's society Harrington, who had no passion for horsemanship, became all of a sudden an ardent sportsman, borrowed his brother's cob, Peter, and was ultimately cajoled into the purchase of an elderly hunter, which was not quite quick enough for his friend Sir Henry.

"You don't mean hunting in the shires, so pace is not of so much consequence to you as it is to me," said the baronet. "Mahmud will carry you beautifully in our country, and he's as quiet as a sheep."

It is possible that this qualification of sheepishness was Mahmud's chief merit in Harrington's estimation. He was a black horse, and looked a good deal for the money. Sir Henry asked a hundred guineas for him, and finally took his friend's acceptance for eighty, and this transaction was the first burden of debt which Harrington Dalbrook laid upon his shoulders after leaving the University. There had been college debts, and he had considerably exceeded a very liberal allowance, but his father had paid those debts to the last shilling; and one grave and stern remonstrance, with a few fatherly words of advice for the future, had been all that Harrington had been called upon to endure. But he did not forget that his father had warned him against the consequences of any future folly.

He felt rather uncomfortable when the black horse was brought to the door one hunting morning, and when his father happened to be in the front office, whence he could see the unknown animal.

"Where did you get that black horse, Harrington? Is it a hire?" he asked.

"No. The fact is I've bought him."

"Have you really? You must be richer than I

gave you credit for being if you can afford to buy yourself a hunter. He looks a well-bred one, but shows work. I hope you didn't give much for him.'

"No; I got him on easy terms."

"Not on credit, I hope."

"No; of course not. Sir Henry Baldwin sold him to me. I had saved a little out of my allowance, don't you know?"

"I'm very glad to hear it. And now be off and get a good day's sport, if you can. I shall want you to stick to your desk to-morrow."

Harrington took up his crop and hurried out, with a heart as heavy as lead. Never until to-day had he told his father a deliberate falsehood; but Matthew Dalbrook's searching look had frightened him out of his veracity. Only six months ago he had solemnly pledged himself to avoid debt, and he had broken his promise already, and owed eighty guineas for a beast which he could hardly hope to ride to hounds half-a-dozen times that season. He had involved himself for the beast's maintenance also, for his father's stables were full, and he had been obliged to put this new animal out at livery.

He began to feel now that he had made a fool of himself; that he had been talked into buying a horse for which he had very little use.

He was jogging along in a low-spirited way when Sir Henry and his sister came up behind him at a sharp trot, whereat Mahmud gave a buck-jump that almost unseated him.

"The black looks a trifle fresh this morning," said Sir Henry. "You'll take it out of him presently. He suits you capitally, and he's well up to your weight. I was a little bit too heavy for him. You'll find him go like old boots."

Miss Baldwin, flushed with fresh air and exercise, looked more than usually brilliant. She was particularly amiable too; and when Harrington complained that he might not be able to give Mahmud enough work she offered to meet the difficulty.

"Send him over to me whenever you don't want him," she said, cheerily. "I'll make him handy for you."

The black gave another buck-jump, and Harrington felt inclined to lay him at her feet there and then. It was only the remembrance of that horrid slip of stamped paper, which had doubtless already

been turned into cash by Sir Henry, which restrained him. He made up his mind to send Mahmud to Tattersall's at the end of the hunting season, to be sold without reserve. Juliet was riding a thorough-bred of which she was particularly fond, and was in very high spirits during the earlier part of the day; and in her lively society Harrington forgot the stamped paper, and gradually got on good terms with his horse. Mahmud had, indeed, no fault but age. He knew a great deal better how to keep near the hounds than his new master, and promised to be a valuable acquisition.

Harrington felt that he was distinguishing himself.

"The black suits you down to the ground," shouted Sir Henry, in the middle of a run, as he bucketed past his friend upon a pulling chestnut that had no respect for anybody, but clove his way through the ruck of riders like a battering-ram.

Sir Henry boasted of this animal that he never kicked a hound.

"Small thanks to him," said the Master, "for he kicks everything else. Hounds are not good enough for him. He nearly smashed my leg last Monday."

Harrington and Juliet did a good deal of quiet flirtation while the hounds were drawing a spinney rather late in the day, after a very good run and a kill. He told her all about the change in his position, and that he was to be his father's partner after a very short apprenticeship to the law.

"And you will live in Dorchester all your life," said Juliet, with an involuntary disgust.

"Not if I can help it. I don't mean to vegetate in a dead-alive provincial town. My father has a London connection already, and all his business wants is a little new blood. I hope to start chambers in Lincoln's Inn Fields before I am many years older. And if I should marry," he continued, faltering a little, "I could afford to have a house in the West End—May Fair or Belgravia, for instance."

"Let it be May Fair, I beg—for your wife's sake, whoever she may be," exclaimed Juliet lightly. "A small house in Belgravia is an abomination. There is an atmosphere of invincible dreariness throughout that district which can only be redeemed by wealth and splendour. Perhaps it is because the place is on a level with Millbank.

There is a flavour of the prison in the very air. Now, in Curzon or Hertford Street one breathes the air of the Park and Piccadilly, and one could exist in a bandbox. But really now, Harrington, joking apart, is it not rather wild in a young man like you —not out of paternal leading-strings—to talk about marriage and housekeeping?"

"One can't help thinking of the future. Besides, I am not so very young. I am four-and-twenty."

Juliet laughed a short cynical laugh, which ended in a sigh. She wondered whether he knew that she was three years older. Brothers are such traitors.

"I am four-and-twenty, and I feel that it is in me to succeed," concluded Harrington, with a comfortable vanity which he mistook for the self-confidence of genius.

The hounds drew blank, and the riders jogged homewards presently, by lane and common, Sir Henry keeping in front with one of his particular friends, and talking horse-flesh all the way, while Juliet and Harrington followed slowly side by side in earnest conversation.

He told her the history of his doubts, about which she did not care twopence—his "phases of

faith and feeling," as he expressed it alliteratively. All she wanted to know was about his prospects—whether his father was as well off as he was said to be—she had heard people talk of him as a very rich man—those officious people who are always calculating other people's incomes, and descanting upon the little their neighbours spend, and the much that they must contrive to save. Juliet had heard a good deal of this kind of talk about Matthew Dalbrook, whose unpretentious and somewhat old-fashioned style of living gave an impression of reserved force—wealth invested and accumulating for a smarter generation. After all, perhaps, this young man, whose adoration was obvious, might not be a despicable *parti*. He might be pretty well off by-and-by, with a fourth, or better than a fourth, share of Matthew Dalbrook's scrapings—and he was Lord Cheriton's cousin, and therefore could hardly be called a nobody.

Moved by these considerations, gravely weighed in the grave and grey November dusk, as they rode slowly between tall hedges, leafy still, but sear and red with the frost, Juliet felt inclined to let herself be engaged to her legal lover. She had been engaged

to several people since she danced at her first ball. The bond did not count for very much in her mind. One could always slip out of that kind of thing, if it became inconvenient — one could manage with such tact that the man himself cried off, if one were afraid of being denounced as a jilt. Juliet and her lovers had always parted friends; and she wore more than one half-hoop of sapphires or of brilliants which had once played a solemn part as her engagement ring, but which had lapsed into a souvenir of friendship.

She was not so foolish as to hasten matters. She wanted to see her way before her; and she opposed Harrington's youthful ardour with the calm *savoir-faire* of seven-and-twenty. She called him a foolish boy, and declared that they must cease to be friends if he insisted upon talking nonsense. She would have to accept a very urgent invitation to Lady Balgowny Brigg's Castle in Scotland, which she had been fencing with for years, if he made it difficult for them to meet. She threw him into a state of abject alarm by this stupendous threat.

"I won't say a word you can take objection to,"

he protested, "though I can't think why you should object."

"You forget that I have to study other people's ideas as well as my own," she answered gently. "I hope you won't be offended if I tell you that my mother would never speak to me again if I were engaged to you."

"No doubt Lady Baldwin has higher views," the young man said meekly.

"Much higher views. My poor mother belongs to the old school. She cannot forget that her grandfather was a marquis. It is foolish, but I suppose it is human nature. Don't let us talk any more about this nonsense. I like you very much as my brother's friend, and I shall go on liking you if you don't make me unhappy by talking nonsense."

Harrington took comfort from that one word "unhappy." It implied depths of feeling beneath that fashionable manner which held him at arm's length.

His spirits were somewhat dashed presently when Miss Baldwin looked with friendly contemptuousness at his neat heather-mixture coat and mud-stained white cords, and said carelessly,—

"It's a pity you don't belong to the Hunt. I fancy you would look rather nice in pink!"

"I—I—have so lately given up the idea of the Church," he faltered.

"Yes, but now you have given it up, you ought to be a member of the Hunt. Let my brother put you up at the next meeting. You are pretty sure of being elected, and then you can order your pink swallow-tail coat in time for the Hunt Ball in December."

Harrington shivered. That would mean two red coats—a hunting coat and a dancing coat. But this idea of twenty pounds laid out upon coats was not the worst. Twenty years ago, when he had ridden as hard and kept as good horses as any member of the Hunt, Matthew Dalbrook had resolutely declined the honour of membership. He had considered that a provincial solicitor had other work than to ride to hounds twice or three times a week. He might allow himself that pleasure now and again as an occasional relaxation in a hard-working professional life; but it was not for him to spend long days tearing about the country with the men of whose lands and interests he was in some wise custodian.

Theodore, who was at heart much more of a sportsman than his younger brother, had respected his father's old-fashioned prejudices, whatever line they took, and he had never allowed his name to be put up for the Hunt. He had subscribed liberally to the fund for contingent expenses, as his father and grandfather had done before him; but he had been content to forego the glory of a scarlet coat, and the privilege of the Hunt buttons.

Harrington was not strong in that chief virtue of man, moral courage—the modern and loftier equivalent for that brute-courage which was the Roman's only idea of virtue. He felt that to acknowledge himself afraid to put up for election into the sacred circle of the Hunt lest he should offend his father, was to own by implication that a solicitor was not quite upon the social level of landed gentry and retired military men, the colonels and majors who form the chief ornament of the average Hunt club.

He murmured something to the effect that his father was not sporting, and wouldn't like him to waste too much time riding to hounds.

"What does that matter?" exclaimed Juliet.

"You needn't go out any oftener because you are a member of the Hunt. There are men who appear scarcely half-a-dozen times in a season—men who have left the neighbourhood, and only come down for a run now and then for old sake's sake."

"I'll think it over," faltered Harrington. "Don't say anything to Sir Henry about it just yet."

"As you please; but I shan't dance with you at the ball if you wear a black coat," said Juliet, giving her bridle a sharp little shake and trotting forward to join her brother.

Mahmud, discomposed by that sudden start, gave a shambling elderly shy; Harrington pulled him up into a walk, and rode sulkily on, and allowed the other three riders to melt from him in the shades of evening.

Yes, she was beautiful exceedingly, and it would be promotion for a country solicitor to be engaged to a girl of such high standing; but he felt that his relations with her were hedged round with difficulty. She was expensive herself, and a cause of expense in others. She had spent the brightest years of her girlhood in visiting in country houses, where everything was on a grander scale than at the Mount. She had escaped

from the barrenness of home to the mansions of noblemen and millionaires. She had strained all her energies towards one aim—to be popular, and to be asked to good houses. She had run the gauntlet of most of the best smoke-rooms in the three kingdoms, and had been talked about everywhere as the handsome Miss Baldwin. Yet her twenty-seventh birthday had sounded, and she was Miss Baldwin still. Half-a-dozen times she had fancied herself upon the eve of a great success—such a marriage as would at once exalt her to the pinnacle of social distinction—and at the last moment, as it seemed, the man had changed his mind. Some malicious mother of ugly daughters, or disappointed spinster, had told the eligible suitor "things" about Miss Baldwin—harmless little deviations from the rigid lines of maidenly etiquette, and the suitor had cried off, fearing in his own succinct speech that he was going to be "had."

At seven-and-twenty, damaged by the reputation of failure—spoken of by the initiated as "that handsome girl Maltravers so nearly married, don't you know?"—Miss Baldwin felt that all hope of a great match was over. The funeral bell of ambition

had tolled. She began to grow reckless; eat her dinner and took her dry champagne with a masculine gusto; smoked as many cigarettes as a secretary of legation; read all the new French novels, and talked about them unreservedly with her partners; was keen upon racing, and loved euchre and nap. She had half made up her mind to throw herself away upon the first wealthy cotton-spinner she might meet up in the North when she allowed herself to be touched by Harrington Dalbrook's somewhat boyish devotion, and began to wonder whether it might not be well for her to end her chequered career by a love match.

He was good-looking, much better educated than her brother and her brother's set, and he adored her. But on the other hand he was utterly without any claims to be considered "smart," and marriage with him would mean at best bread and cheese—or would at least mean nothing better than bread and cheese until they should both be middle-aged, and she should have lost all semblance of a waist. She had met solicitors' wives in society who wore diamonds, and who hurried away from evening parties because they were afraid of their horses catching cold—a carefulness which to her mind implied that horses

were a novelty. She had even heard of solicitors making big fortunes; but she concluded that those were exceptional men, and she did not see in Harrington's character the potentiality of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice.

Moved by these mixed feelings she allowed her lover to dangle in a state of uncertainty, and to spend all his spare cash upon those airy nothings which a young lady of Miss Baldwin's easy temper will accept from even a casual admirer. He knew the glover whose gloves she approved, and she occasionally told him the colour of a gown in advance, so that he might give her a suitable fan; and she had, furthermore, an off-hand way of mentioning any songs or new French novels she fancied.

"How very sweet of you," she would say, when the songs or the books appeared, "but it is really too bad—I must never mention anything I want in your hearing."

In spite of which wise remark the volatile damsel went on mentioning things, and being surprised when her wishes were gratified.

Miss Baldwin had met Lady Cheriton and her

daughter both in town and country, and she and her people had been invited to garden parties at Cheriton Chase, but there had been no intimacy between the families. Lady Cheriton shrank with an inward terror from a young lady of such advanced opinions as those which dropped like pearls and diamonds—or like toads and adders—according to the idea of her hearers—from Miss Baldwin's lips. Rumours of the young man's infatuation had been conveyed to the Priory by Lady Jane, and Harrington having gone to a family dinner at Milbrook was severely interrogated by his cousin.

"I hope there is no truth in what I have heard about you, Harry," she said confidentially, when he was sitting by her in her favourite corner within the shadow of the tall screen.

"I cannot answer that question until you tell me what you have heard," he replied with offended dignity.

"Something that would make me very unhappy if it were true. I was told you were getting entangled with that Miss Baldwin."

"I don't know why you should lay such an offen-

sive emphasis upon the demonstrative pronoun. Miss Baldwin is beautiful and accomplished—and—I am very proud of being attached to her."

"Has it gone so far as that, Harry? Are you actually engaged to her?"

"I am not actually engaged—she has a right to look a good deal higher—but I hope to make her my wife as soon as I am in a position to marry. She has given me so much encouragement that I don't think she will refuse me when the right time comes."

"But, my dear boy, she is always giving encouragement," exclaimed Juanita, anxiously.

Dear little Lucy Grenville was at the piano at the other end of the room playing an infantile arrangement of "Batti, batti," with fingers of iron, while mother and grandmother hung over her enraptured, and while the rest of the family party talked their loudest, so the cousins in the nook by the fire were not afraid of being overheard. "She is the most encouraging young lady I ever heard of. She has jilted and been jilted a dozen times, I believe——"

"You *believe*," echoed Harrington, with intense indignation; "I wonder that a girl of your good

sense—in most things—can give heed to such idle gossip."

"Do you mean to say that she has not been jilted?"

"Certainly not. I admit that her name has been associated with the names of men in society. Silly people who write for the papers have given out things about her. She was to marry Lord Welbeck, Sir Humphrey Random—Heaven knows whom. A girl can't stay at big houses, and be admired as she has been, without all manner of reports getting about. But she is heartily sick of that kind of life, an endless web of unmeaning gaieties—that is what she herself called it. She will be very glad to settle down to a refined, quiet life—say, at the West End of London, with a victoria and brougham, and a small house, prettily furnished. One can furnish so prettily and so cheaply now-a-days," concluded Harrington, with his mind's eye upon certain illustrated advertisements he had seen of late—Jacobean dining-rooms—Sheraton drawing-rooms—for a mere song.

"I have heard people say that a reformed rake makes a good husband," said Juanita gravely, "but

I have never heard that a reformed flirt makes a good wife."

"It is a shame to talk like that, Juanita. Every handsome girl is more or less a flirt. She can't help flirting. Men insist upon flirting with her."

"Does your father know you mean to marry Miss Baldwin?"

"No, I have never mentioned marriage to him. That will come in good time."

"And do you think he will approve?"

"I don't know. He is full of old-fashioned prejudices; but I don't see how he can object to my marrying into one of the county families."

"Don't you think it will be more like Miss Baldwin marrying out of one of the county families? I'm afraid from what I know of her brother and of old Lady Baldwin they would both want her to marry money."

"I suppose they have wanted that for the last four or five years," answered Harrington; "but it has not come off, and they must be satisfied if she chooses to marry for love."

"Well, I mustn't plague you any more, Harry. I see your heart is too deeply involved. I hope Miss

Baldwin is a nicer girl than I have ever thought her. Girls are sometimes prejudiced against each other."

"Occasionally," said Harrington, with satirical emphasis.

Lucy finished "Batti, batti," with a final chord in the bass and a final twirl in the treble, and was pronounced by her grandmother to have achieved wonders.

"Her time is a little uncertain," her mother remarked modestly; "but she has a magnificent ear. You should see her run to the window when there is an organ in the street."

"Yes, mother," cried Johnny, "but she never stays to listen unless there is a monkey on the top."

December came, and the Hunt Ball, at which more than one of Miss Baldwin's discarded or discarding admirers were present. The young lady looked very handsome in white satin and gauze, without a vestige of colour about her costume, and with her bodice cut with an audacity which is the peculiar privilege of dressmakers who live south of Oxford Street. The white gown set off Miss Bald-

win's brilliant colouring, and looked well against the pink coats of her partners.

Harrington's dress suit had been a thing of beauty and a joy to him when it came home from his London tailor's, folded as no human hands could ever fold it again, enshrined in layers of tissue-paper. His sisters had helped to unpack the tailor's parcel, and had exclaimed at the extravagance of the corded-silk lapels and the satin sleeve-lining, and he had himself deemed that the archetypal coat could scarcely be more beautiful. Yet in this lurid ball-room he felt ashamed of his modest black twilled kersimere, and the insignificance of his white tie. The fox-hunters seemed to him to have it all their own way.

Miss Baldwin, however, was not unkind. She danced with him oftener than with any one else, especially after supper, when she became unconscientious and forgetful as to her engagements, and when her card was found to hold twice as many names as there were dances, together with a pencil sketch of a lobster waltzing with a champagne bottle, supplied by an unknown hand.

It was a cold, clear night, and youth and impru-

dence were going in couples to the garden behind the ball-room for coolness between the dances, and to look at the frosty stars, which in the enthusiasm of girlhood were accepted as a novelty. Harrington and Juliet were among those who ventured into the garden, the lady wrapped in a great white fur cloak, which made her look like a haystack in a snow-piece.

"Poor Doriscourt brought me this polar bear-skin," she said. "He shot the bear himself, at the risk of his life. I had asked him to bring me a skin when he came home."

"You asked him to give you something for which he must risk his life, and yet you make a great fuss at accepting Daudet's last novel from me," said Harrington, with tender reproachfulness.

"Ah, but you and Doriscourt are so different," exclaimed Juliet, rather contemptuously. "He was a great dare-devil, who would have come down hand-over-hand on a rope from the moon if there had been any way of getting up there."

"What has become of him?"

"Dead! He died a year ago—of drink, I'm afraid—lung-complaint complicated with del. trem. Poor fellow!"

She breathed a deep sigh, with that little pensive air which in a young lady of experience is as much as to say, "He was the only man I ever loved," and then she turned the conversation and talked of the supper and the champagne, which she sweepingly condemned.

Harrington hated that talk about the supper. He would have preferred talking of the stars like a schoolgirl, or Claude Melnotte, "wondering what star should be our home when love becomes immortal." To be told that the wine which now glowed in his veins and intensified his passion was not worth three-and-sixpence a bottle jarred upon his finer feelings. "You are such a cynic," he said. "I think I shall never get any nearer to your real self—for I know there is a heart under that mocking vein."

And then he repeated his simple story of a humble, devoted love—humble because the woman he loved was the loveliest among all womankind, and because she occupied a higher plane than that on which his youth had been spent.

"But you have taught me what ambition means," he said. "Only promise to be my wife and you

shall see that I am in earnest—that it is in me to succeed."

She had long been wavering—touched by his truthfulness, his boyish devotion—very weary of life at the Mount, where the mother scolded and the sister sneered, where the underfed and underpaid servants were frankly disobliging, where her brother rarely saw his womankind except at meals, which periods of family life he enlivened by a good deal of strong language, grumbling at the cookery, and at the deterioration of landed property in general, and his own in particular. The rest of his home-life he spent in the billiard room or the stables, since he found the society of the saddle-room more congenial than the dreariness of the drawing-room, where his mother and sisters were not always on speaking terms.

From such a house as the Mount—goodly and fair to look upon without as many other whited sepulchres—any escape would be welcome. Juliet felt that she was a great deal too good for a young man of uncertain prospects and humdrum surroundings; but he was very much in love, and he was good-looking, and in her

own particular phraseology she was beginning to be rather weak about him. She was so weak that she let him hold her unresisting hand as they stood side by side in the garden, and devour it with kisses.

"You certainly ought to do well in the world," she said, sweetly; "for you are the most persistent person I ever knew."

He looked round, saw that they were alone in the garden and clasped her in his arms, polar bear and all, and kissed the unresisting lips, as he had kissed the unresisting hand.

"My dearest," he exclaimed, "that means for life, does it not?"

"You are taking everything for granted," she said; "but I suppose it must be so. Only remember I don't want our engagement talked about till you are in a more assured position. My mother would make home a hell upon earth, if she knew."

"I will do nothing rash, nothing that you do not approve," replied Harrington, considerably relieved by this injunction; for although it was not Matthew Dalbrook's habit to make a pandemonium of the family circle, Harrington feared that he would

strongly disapprove of such an alliance as that which his younger son had chosen for himself. He welcomed the idea of delay, hoping to be more firmly seated at the office desk before he must needs make the unpleasing avowal. "When my father finds I am valuable to him he will be more inclined to indulgence," he thought.

## CHAPTER III.

"For men have marble, women waxen minds,
And therefore are they formed as marble will;
The weak oppress'd, the impression of change kinds,
Is form'd in them by force, by fraud, or skill;
Then call them not the authors of their ill."

Inclination would have taken Theodore Dalbrook to Dorsetshire before the Christmas holidays gave him an excuse for going home; but he wrestled with that haunting desire to revisit the Priory, and to be again *tête-à-tête* with his cousin in the dimly-lighted room where she had talked to him of her own sorrows and of his ambitions. The memory of that last evening was the most vivid element in his life. It stood out like a spot of light against the dull grey of monotonous days, and the burden of dry-as-dust reading. But he had told her that he should not see her until Christmas time, and he was not weak enough to indulge that insane longing for the society of a woman whose heart was in the grave of her husband.

November and the greater part of December stretched before him, like a long dark road which had to be trodden somehow before he came to the inn at which there would be light and comfort, cheerful voices, and friendly greetings. He set his face resolutely towards that dark prospect, and tramped along, doing the work he had to do, living the life of a hermit in those chambers in Ferret Court, which had already taken the stamp of his own character, and looked as if he had lived in them for years.

He had no need to sit alone at night with his books and his lamp, for there were plenty of houses in which he would have been welcome. His name was a passport in legal circles. Old friends of James Dalbrook's were ready to welcome his kinsman to their tables, eager to be of service to him. He had his college friends, too, in the great city, and need not have gone companionless. But he was not in the mood for society of any kind, old or young, except the society of Blackstone, Coke, and Justinian, and divers other sages who out of the dim past shed their light upon the legal wilderness of the present. He sat by his fire and read law, and

laid down his book only to smoke his meditative pipe and indulge in foolish waking dreams about that grave old house in Dorsetshire and the young widow who lived there.

He had followed two of those three children of the old squire, two out of the three faces in the picture in the hall at Cheriton, to the end of their story. No man could discover any postscript to that story, which in each case was closed by a grave.

There remained only one last unfinished record—the history of the runaway wife, the end whereof was open to doubt. That unlucky lady's fate had been accepted upon hearsay. It had been said that she had died at Boulogne, within a year or so after the Vicar met her there.

Upon his return from Jersey, Theodore wrote to his father's oldest and most experienced clerk, begging him to hunt up the evidence of Mrs. Darcy's death, so far as it was obtainable at Cheriton or in the neighbourhood.

The clerk replied as follows, after an interval of ten days:—

"Dear Sir,—I have been twice to Cheriton, and have made inquiries, cautiously as you wished,

with respect to the report of Mrs. Darcy's death, some fifteen years ago, and saw Mr. Dolby, the doctor, and Gaster at the general shop, who, as you are no doubt aware, is a gentleman who busies himself a good deal about other people's affairs, and sets himself up for being an authority upon most things.

"Mr. Dolby I found very vague in his ideas. He remembered the late vicar telling him about having met Mrs. Darcy in the market place at Boulogne, and being shocked at the change in her. He told Mr. Dolby that he did not think she was long for this world; but it was some time after when Dolby heard some one—he could not remember who it was—assert that Mrs. Darcy was dead.

"Gaster had much more to say upon the subject. He pretends to be interested in all reminiscences of the Strangways, and boasts of having served Cheriton House for nearly forty years. He remembers Evelyn Strangway when she was a little girl, handsome and high-spirited. He remembered the report of her death at Boulogne getting about the village, and he remembered mentioning the fact to Lord Cheriton at the time. There was an election going on just then, and his lordship had looked in to consult

him, Joseph Gaster, about certain business details: and his lordship seemed shocked to hear of the poor lady's death. 'I suppose that is the end of the family, my lord?' Gaster said, and his lordship replied, 'Yes, that is the end of the Strangways.'

"Gaster believes that he must have read of the death in the newspapers; perhaps copied from the *Times* into a local paper; at any rate, the fact had implanted itself in his mind, and it had never occurred to him to doubt it.

"I asked him if he knew what had become of the lady's husband, but here his mind is a blank. He had heard that the man was a scamp, and that was all he knew about him.

"Since making these inquiries I have spent a long evening at the Literary Institute, where, as you know, there is a set of the *Times*, in volumes, extending over a period of forty years. I have looked through the deaths for three years, taking the year in which Gaster *thinks* he heard of Mrs. Darcy's death, as the middle year out of three, but without result. It is of course unlikely that the death would be advertised if the poor lady died friendless and in poverty in a foreign town; but

I thought it my duty to make this investigation.

"Awaiting your further commands, &c., &c."

There was nothing conclusive in this; and Theodore felt that the history of Mrs. Darcy's later years remained to be unravelled. It was not to be supposed that the runaway wife, who, if she were yet living must be an elderly woman, could have had act or part in the murder of Sir Godfrey Carmichael; but it was not the less a part of his task to trace her story to its final chapter. Then only could he convince Juanita of the wildness of that idea which connected the catastrophe of the 29th of July with the exiled Strangways. When he could say to her, "You see that long before that fatal night the Squire's three children had vanished from this earth," she would be constrained to confess that the solution of the mystery was not to be sought here.

He went over to Boulogne, saw the English chaplain, and several of the hotel-keepers. He explored the cemetery, and examined the record of the dead. He visited the police, and he made friends with the elderly editor of an old-established newspaper; but

from all his questioning of various people the result was blank. Nobody remembered a Mrs. Darcy, an Englishwoman of distinguished appearance but fallen fortunes, a woman long past youth and yet not old. If she had lived for any time in Boulogne she had left no trace of her existence; if she had died and been buried there she had left no record among the graves.

Boulogne could tell him nothing. He came back to the great wilderness of London, the rallying point for all wanderers. It was there perhaps that the end of Evelyn Strangway was to be sought.

He had, as it seemed to him, only one clue, the name of her governess. The governess was only seven or eight years older than the pupil, and she might have survived her pupil, and might have been in communication with her till the end. Jasper Blake had told him that there was a strong attachment between Sarah Newton and the wayward girl she taught.

To hunt for a governess among the thousands of portionless gentlewomen who try to live by teaching might seem more hopeless than the proverbial search for the lost needle, but Theodore did not despair.

If Miss Newton had remained a spinster and had continued to exercise her vocation as a teacher she might be traced through one of those agencies which transact business between governess and employer; but, on the other hand, if, as was more likely, she had long ago abandoned the profession of teacher, and had made some obscure marriage, she would have sunk into the vast ocean of middle-class life, in whose depths it would be almost impossible to discover her. The first thing to be done was to make a visitation of the agencies, and this task Theodore began two days after his return from Boulogne.

He had methodized his life by this time, devoting a certain portion of his days to his cousin's interests, but in no wise neglecting the work he had to do for his own advancement. He had known too many instances of men who had made reading law an excuse for an idle and desultory life, and he was resolved that his own course should be steady and persistent even to doggedness. He had been told that success at the Bar was now-a-days almost unattainable; that the men of the day who had conquered fame and were making great fortunes, were

in a manner miraculous men, and that it was futile for any young man to hope to follow in their steps. The road *they* had trodden was barred against the new comer. Theodore listened to these pessimists, yet was not discouraged. He had told himself that he would emerge somehow from the obscurity of a country solicitor's practice—would bring himself in some wise nearer the social level of the woman he loved, so that if in the days to come one gleam of hope should ever shine upon that love he might be able to say to her, "My place in life is the place your father held when he offered himself to your mother: my determination to conquer fortune is not less than his."

He seldom passed the dingy door of the ground-floor chambers—on which the several names of three briefless ones were painted in dirty letters that had once been white—without thinking of his fortunate kinsman, without wondering what his life had been like in those darksome rooms, and in what shape fortune had first appeared to him. He had not married until he was forty. Long and lonely years had gone before that golden summertide of his life, when a young and lovely woman had given him

happiness and fortune. How had he lived in those lonely years? Tradition accused him of miserly habits, of shabby raiment, of patient grinding and scraping to accumulate wealth. Theodore knew that if he had hoarded his earnings it had been for a worthy end. He had set himself to win a place among the lords of the soil. The land he loved had been to him as a mistress, and for that he had been content to live poorly and spend his nights in toil. For such miserliness Theodore had nothing but admiration; for he had seen how liberally the man who had scraped and hoarded was able to administer a large income—how generous as a master, friend, and patron the sometime miser had shown himself.

He spent more than a week in visiting the numerous agencies which are employed by the great governess-class, and the result of that painstaking exploration was not altogether barren. He succeeded in finding an elderly personage at the head of an old-established Agency, who kept her books with praiseworthy regularity, and who remembered Sarah Newton. She had had no less than four Miss Newtons on her register at different times, but there was only one Sarah Newton among them,

and for this lady she had obtained a situation in the Lake country so lately as July 20, 1873—that is to say, about eleven years before the period of Theodore's investigation.

On that date Miss Newton had entered the family of a Mr. Craven—the vicar of a small parish between Ambleside and Bowness. She was living in that family four years afterwards, when Miss Palmer, the Principal in the Agency, last heard of her.

"And in all probability she is living there still," said Miss Palmer. "At her time of life people are not fond of change. I remember her when she was a young woman, full of energy, and very impatient of control. I used to see her much oftener then. She seldom kept a situation over a twelve-month."

"Except at Cheriton Chase. She was more than a year in that situation, I think."

"Cheriton Chase! I don't remember the name. Some one else may have got her the situation. How long ago was she there, do you suppose?" asked Miss Palmer, turning over one of her neat basil-bound registers.

"It was in the year '47 she left Cheriton."

"Ah, then, it was not we who got her the situa-

tion. My first entry about her is on the 11th December, '48. She paid her entrance fee of one guinea on that date. It is higher than that of inferior agencies; but we take real trouble for our clients, and we make it our business to be safe upon the point of CHARACTER. We are as careful about the families into which we send governesses as about the governesses we introduce into families."

The next day was Sunday, and Theodore employed that day of rest in travelling by a very slow train to Bowness; where he arrived at five o'clock in the evening, to find mountain and lake hidden in densest grey, and an innkeeper who seemed neither to desire nor deserve visitors. Happily the traveller was of the age at which dinner is not a vital question, and he was hardly aware of the toughness of the steak, or the inferior quality of the codfish set before him in the desolate coffee room. He had a diamond Virgil in his pocket, and he sat by the fire reading the sixth book by the paraffin lamp till ten o'clock, and then went contentedly to a bedroom which suggested ghosts, or at least nightmare.

No deadly visions troubled him, however, for the slow train had brought about a condition of abject weariness which resulted in dreamless slumber. The sun shone into his bleak bed-chamber when he awoke next morning, and the lake stretched beneath his windows, silver-shining, melting dimly into the grey of the opposite shore. The mountains were sulking still, and only showed their rugged crests above dark rolling clouds; but the scene was an improvement upon the avenue of chimney-pots and distant glimpse of a murky Thames as seen from Ferret Court.

His landlord greeted him in a more cheerful spirit upon Monday morning than he had evinced on Sunday evening when his after-dinner lethargy was rudely disturbed by a guest whose business-like air and small Gladstone bag did not promise much profit; a visitor who would want a dinner off the joint, most likely, and a half-crown breakfast; a visitor whose libations would be limited to bitter beer and an occasional whisky and soda. Such a guest in a house that was beginning to hibernate was a burden rather than a boon.

This morning, however, the landlord was recon-

ciled to his solitary customer, having told his wife that after all, "little fish are sweet," and he went blithely to order the dog-cart—his own cart and own man—ostler in the season, coachman or anything you please out of the season—to drive Mr. Dalbrook to Kettisford Vicarage, a nine-mile journey.

It was a pretty, out-of-the-way nook—half hidden in a cleft of the hills—at which Theodore arrived a few minutes after noon; a little, old-fashioned, world-forgotten village, and a sprawling old grey-stone house, covered with Virginia creeper, passion-flower, and the feathery leafage of the trumpet ash; a long, low house, with heavily thatched roof, projecting over its upper casements; a sleepy-looking old house in a still sleepier garden, so remote and so sheltered that winter had forgotten to come there; and the great yellow roses were still blooming on the wall, fattened by the misty atmosphere of the adjacent lake, glorified by the untainted air. November was half over, yet here the only signs of autumn were the grey sky, and the crimson of the Virginia creeper.

The Vicar of Kettisford was one of those privileged persons who can speak with their enemies

at the gate, assured of being backed up in their speech by a family contingent. The Vicarage seemed overflowing with young life, from the very threshold of the hall, where cricket-bats, a tricycle, a row of well-used tennis rackets, a stupendous array of hats, overcoats, and comforters, testified to that quiverful so esteemed in the patriarchal age.

A conscientious performer was pounding at the "Harmonious Blacksmith" upon a wiry piano near at hand, having left the door wide open, with the indecent disregard of other people peculiar to juvenile performers upon all kinds of instruments. From the other side of the hall came the twanging of an equally wiry guitar, upon which girlish fingers began, and for ever re-commenced a Spanish melody, which the performer was striving to attain by that agonizing process known among young ladies as "picking up" an air. Mark, gentle reader, what the learned and reverend Haweis has to say upon this art of playing by ear!

From a remoter room came young voices and young laughter; and amidst all these sounds it was hardly surprising that Mr. Dalbrook had to ring three times, and to wait in front of the open hall

door for at least ten minutes, before an elderly housemaid responded to his summons and ushered him into the Vicar's study, the one room in the Vicarage which was ever fit to receive a visitor.

The Vicar was reading a newspaper in front of a comfortable fire. He was an elderly man, of genial and even jovial aspect, and he received Mr. Dalbrook's apologetic account of himself and his business with perfect good humour.

"You want to see Miss Newton, my dear sir. I am sorry to tell you she left us nearly two years ago—heartily sorry, for Sarah Newton is a very worthy woman, and a jewel of price in a motherless family like mine," said the Vicar. "I regret that you should have come such a long way to find her when, had you written to me, I could have told you where to look for her in London."

"Yes, it was a mistake to come so far without making preliminary inquiries—only, as she had not applied to her usual agent for a new situation, I concluded that she was still under your roof."

"She has not gone into a new situation, Mr. Dalbrook. She was too much valued in this house to wish to change to another employment, although

she might have lived more luxuriously and done less work elsewhere. She was a mother to my girls—ay, and to my boys as well—while she was with us; and she only left us when she made up her mind to live an independent life."

"She has left off teaching, then, I conclude?"

"Yes. She had a little bit of money left her by a bachelor uncle, safely invested in railway stock, and yielding about two hundred a year. This, with her own savings, made her an independent woman, and she made up her mind to realize her own ideal of a useful life—an ideal which had been developing in her mind for a good many years—a life which was to be serviceable to others, and yet pleasant to herself."

"Do you mean that she joined some sisterhood?"

"No, no, Mr. Dalbrook, Sarah Newton is much too fond of her own way, much too independent and fiery a spirit, to place herself in a position where other people would think for her, and where she would be obliged to obey. She told me her plan of life very frankly. 'I have about two hundred and sixty pounds a year,' she said; 'I can live comfortably upon half that money, if I live after a plan of my own; and I can do a great deal of good with

the other half if I do it in my own way. I am elderly and plain. If I were to live amongst small gentilities I should be a nobody, and in all probability I should be considered a bore. I shall take a lodging in a poor neighbourhood, furnish my rooms with the utmost comfort, treat myself to a good piano, and collect my little library book by book from the second-hand booksellers. I shall spend half my days in going quietly about among the poor young women of the district—I ought to know what girls are after nearly forty years' teaching and managing the species—and I shall spend half my income in doing as much good to them as I can, in my own unorthodox way.' I knew the good that brave little soul had done in this parish, in her quiet, unpretentious fashion, and I felt no doubt she would carry out her plan."

"Have you seen her since she left you?"

"Yes, I went to see her last June when I had a fortnight's holiday in London. I found her in a shabby old house in Lambeth, not very far from St. Thomas's Hospital; but dingy as the house looked outside, our good Sally's apartments were the picture of comfort. I found her as happy as a

bird. Her plan of life had answered her highest expectations. 'My friends are legion,' she said, 'but I haven't a single gentility among them.' Sally is a desperate Radical, you must know."

"Will you give me her address, that I may write and ask her permission to call upon her?"

"You shall have the address, but I doubt if she will feel disposed to receive you. She will count you among the gentilities."

"I must try my chance at any rate. I want her to throw some light upon the history of one of her earliest pupils. Did you ever hear her talk of Cheriton Chase and the Strangway family?"

"My dear sir, I have heard her talk of any number of places, and any number of people. I used to tell her she must be a female Methuselah to have passed through so many experiences. She was very fond of telling stories of the families in which she had lived, but though I used to listen I remember very little about them. My girls would remember better, I have no doubt. They can give you chapter and verse, I daresay; so the best thing you can do is to eat your luncheon with us, and

then you can ask them as many questions as you like."

Theodore accepted the offer with gratitude, and ten minutes afterwards followed the Vicar into the dining-room, where three tall, good-looking girls and two straggling youths were assembled, and where a ourth girl and another boy dropped in after the rest were seated. The board was spread with a plenteous but homely meal. A large dish of Irish stew smoked at one end of the table, and the remains of yesterday's roast ribs of beef appeared at the other.

The girls were evidently accustomed to droppers in, and received Theodore with perfect equanimity.

Alicia, the eldest, carved the beef with a commanding wrist, and the third daughter, Laura, administered to his appetite with pickled walnuts and mashed potatoes. The girls were all keenly interested directly he spoke of Miss Newton. They pronounced her a dear old thing, not a bit like a governess.

"We all loved her," said Alicia; "and we are not the easiest girls to get on with, I can assure you. We have had two poor things since Sally

deserted us, and we have driven them both away. And now we are enjoying an interregnum, and we hope the dear father will make it a long one."

"Did you ever hear your governess talk of the Strangways, Miss Craven?"

"What, Evelyn Strangway, of Cheriton Chase? I should think we did, indeed," cried Laura. "She had a good many prosy stories—chestnuts, we used to call them—but the Cheriton Chase stories were the most chestnutty. It was her first situation, and she was never tired of talking about it."

"Do you know if she kept up her acquaintance with Miss Strangway in after life?" asked Theodore.

"I think not; at any rate, she never talked about that. She knew something about the poor girl's later life—something very bad, I think—for she would never tell us. She used to sigh and look very unhappy if the subject was touched upon; and she used to warn us against runaway matches. As if any of us would be likely to run away from this dear old father?" protested Laura, leaning over the table to pat the Vicar's coat sleeve. "Why, he

would let us marry chimney-sweeps rather than see us unhappy."

There was a good deal more talk about Sarah Newton, her virtues and her little peculiarities, but nothing bearing upon Theodore's business, so he only stayed till luncheon was finished, and then wished the amiable Vicar and his family a friendly good-bye, offering to be of use to them in London at any time they might want some small business transacted there, and begging the Vicar to look him up at his chambers when he took his next holiday.

"You may rely upon it I shall take you at your word," said the parson cheerily. "You've no idea what a gay old dog I am when I am in town—the theatre every night, and a little bit of supper afterwards. I generally take one of my lads with me, though, to keep me out of mischief. Good-bye, and mind you don't fall in love with Sally Newton. She's old and ugly, but she's one of the most fascinating women I know."

Theodore drove off in the dog-cart with all the Vicarage family at the gate waving their hands to him, as if he had been an old friend, and with four Vicarage dogs barking at him.

He went back to London that night, and wrote to Miss Newton, asking leave to call upon her upon a matter relating to one of her old pupils on the following day. He should take silence to mean consent, and would be with her at four in the afternoon, if he did not receive a telegram to forbid him.

He worked in his chambers all the morning, and at a little after three set out to walk to Lambeth. The address was 51, Wedgewood Street, near the Lambeth Road. It was not a long walk, and it was not a pleasant one, for a seasonable fog was gathering when Theodore left the Temple, and it thickened as he crossed Westminster Bridge, where the newly-lighted lamps made faint yellow patches in the dense brown atmosphere. Under these conditions it took him some time to find Wedgewood Street, and that particular house which had the honour of sheltering Sarah Newton.

It was a very shabby old street. The shops were of the meanest order, and the houses which were not shops looked as if they were mostly let off to the struggling class of lodgers; but it was a street that had evidently seen better days, for the houses were large and substantially built, and the doorways had

once been handsome and architectural—houses which had been the homes of prosperous citizens when Lambeth was out of town, and when the perfume of bean blossom and new mown hay found its way into Wedgewood Street.

The ground-floor of Number 51 was occupied by a shoemaker, a shoemaker who had turned his parlour into a shop, who made to measure, but was not above executing repairs neatly. The front door being open, Theodore walked straight upstairs to the first-floor landing, where there was a neat little Doulton ware oil-lamp burning on a carved oak bracket, and where he saw Miss Newton's name painted in bold black letters upon a terra-cotta coloured door. The stairs were cleaner than they generally are in such a house, and the landing was spotless.

He rang a bell, and the door was promptly opened by a lady, whom he took to be Miss Newton. She was rather below middle height, strongly built, but of a neat, compact figure. She was decidedly plain, and her iron grey hair was coarse and wiry; but she had large bright eyes which beamed with good nature and intelligence. Her black stuff gown and narrow

linen collar, the knot of scarlet ribbon at her throat, and the linen cuffs turned back over perfectly-fitting sleeves, were all the pink of neatness, and suited her as no other kind of dress would have done. The trim figure, the bright eyes, and the small white hands made a favourable impression upon Theodore, in spite of the lady's homeliness of feature and complexion.

"Walk in, Mr. Dalbrook," she said cheerily. "Pray come and sit by the fire, you must be chilled to the bone after coming through that horrid fog. Ah, how I hate fog. It is the scourge of the London poor, and it sometimes kills even the rich. And now we are only at the beginning of the evil, and there is the long winter before us."

"Yes, it is very bad, no doubt; but you do not look as if the fog could do you much harm, Miss Newton."

"No, it won't hurt *me*. I'm a hardy old plant, and I contrive to make myself comfortable at all seasons."

"You do, indeed," he answered, glancing round the room. "I had no idea——"

"That anybody could be so comfortable in Lam-

beth," she said, interpreting his thoughts. "No, people think they must pay for what they call 'a good situation.' Poor pinched widows and shabby spinsters spend more than half their income on rent and taxes, and starve on the other half, in order to live in a genteel locality—some dingy little street in Pimlico perhaps, or a stucco terrace in Kensington. Here am I with two fine large rooms in a forgotten old street, which was built before the age of shoddy. I live among poor people, and am not obliged to sacrifice a sixpence for the sake of appearances. I buy everything in the cheapest market, and my neighbours look up to me, instead of looking down upon me, as they might if I lived among gentilities. You will say, perhaps, that I live in the midst of dirt and squalor. If I do I take care that none of it ever comes near me, and I do all that one woman's voice and one woman's pen can do to lessen the evils that I see about me."

"It would be a good thing for poor neighbourhoods if there were many ladies of your mind, Miss Newton," said Theodore, basking in the glow of the fire, and looking lazily round the room, with its two well-filled bookcases, occupying the recesses on each

side of the fireplace, its brackets and shelves, and hanging pockets, its large old-fashioned sofa, and substantial claw-footed table, its wicker chairs, cushioned with bright colour—its lamps and candlesticks on shelf and bracket, ready to the hand when extra light should be wanted, its contrivances and handinesses of all kinds, which denoted the womanly inventiveness of the tenant.

"Well, I believe it would. If only a small percentage of the lonely spinsters of England would make their abode among the poor, things would have to be mended somehow. There could not be such crying evils as there are if there were more eyes to see them, and more voices to protest against them. You like this old room of mine, I see, Mr. Dalbrook," added Sarah Newton, following his eyes as they surveyed the dark red wall against which the brackets and shelves, and books and photographs, and bits of old china stood out in bright relief.

"I am full of admiration and surprise!"

"It is all my own work. I had lived in other people's houses so long that I was charmed to have a home of my own, even in Lambeth. I was de-

termined to spend very little money, and yet to make myself comfortable; so I just squatted in the next room for the first three months, with only a bedstead, a table, and a chair or two, while I prowled all over London to find the exact furniture I wanted. There's not an article in the room that did not take me weeks to find and to buy, and there's not an article that wasn't a tremendous bargain. But what an egotistical old prattler I am! Women who live much alone get to be dreadful prosers. I won't say another word about myself—at any rate, not till after I've made you a cup of tea after your cold walk."

She had seen the mud upon his boots and guessed that he had walked from the Temple.

"Pray do not take any trouble——"

"Nonsense; it is never trouble to a woman to make tea. I give a tea party twice a week. I hope you like tea?"

"I adore it. But pray go on with your account of how you settled down here. I am warmly interested."

"That's very good of you—but there's not much to tell about myself," said Miss Newton, producing

some pretty old china out of an antique cupboard with glass doors, and setting out a little brass tea tray while she talked.

There was a small copper kettle singing on the old-fashioned hob, and there was a covered dish of toast in the capacious fender. Miss Newton's dinners were ever of the slightest, but she was a sybarite as to her tea and toast. No cheap and powdery mixture; no "inferior Dosset" for her. She made her brew with a dainty precision which Theodore admired, while she went on talking.

"Do you like the colour of the walls? Yes, I painted them. And you like that paper on the ceiling? I papered it. I am rather a dab at carpentering, too, and I put up all those shelves and brackets, and I covered the chairs, and stained the boards round that old Turkey carpet; and then, after a day's hard work, it was very pleasant to go and stroll about among the bookshops of an evening and pick up a volume here and there till I got all my old friends about me. I felt like Elia; only I had no Bridget to share my pleasure."

She seated herself opposite to him with a wicker table in front of her, and began to pour out the tea.

He wondered to find himself as much at home with her as if he had known her all his life.

"It is very good of you to receive me so cordially," he said, presently. "I feel that I come to you as an unauthorized intruder."

"Can you guess why I was willing to receive you?" she asked, looking at him intently and with a sudden gravity. "Can you guess why I didn't telegraph to forbid your coming?"

"Indeed, no, except because you are naturally kind."

"My kindness had nothing to do with it. I was willing to see you because of your name. It is a very familiar name to me—Dalbrook, the name of the man who bought the house in which she was born. Poor soul, how she must have hated him, in her desolate after years. How she must have hated the race that ousted her from the home she loved."

You are talking of Evelyn Strangway!"

"Yes, she was my first pupil, and I was very fond of her—all the fonder of her, perhaps, because she was wayward and difficult to manage: and because I was much too young and inexperienced to exercise any authority over her."

"It is of her I want to talk to you, if you will allow me."

"Certainly. I like talking of those old days when I was a girl. I don't suppose I was particularly happy at Cheriton Chase; but I was young, and we most of us hug the delusion that we were happy in our youth. Poor Evelyn—so often in disgrace—so often unhappy, from the very dawn of girlhood. What reason can *you* have for being curious about her?"

"I have a very strong reason, though I cannot explain it yet awhile. I have set myself to discover the history of that banished race."

"After the angel with the flaming sword stood at the gate—that is to say, after Mr. Dalbrook bought the property. By the by, what are you to Lord Cheriton? His son perhaps?"

"No, I am only a distant cousin."

"Is it on his account you are making these inquiries?"

"He is not even aware that I am making them."

"Indeed, and pray how did you find me out? My tea-parties are not recorded in the Society papers

I have never figured among 'Celebrities at Home.'"

"I took some pains to find you," said Theodore, and then he told her of his visits to the agencies, and his journey to the Vicarage in Lakeland.

"You have taken infinite trouble, and for a small result. I can give you very little information about Evelyn Strangway—afterwards Mrs. Darcy."

"Did you lose sight of her after you left Cheriton?"

"Yes, for a long time. It was years before we met again; but she wrote to me several times from Lausanne, during the first year of her banishment; doleful letters, complaining bitterly of her father's cruelty in keeping her away from her beloved Cheriton, the horses and dogs, the life she loved. School she detested. She was clever, but she had no taste for intellectual pursuits. She soon wearied of the lake and the mountains, and the humdrum society of a small town. She wrote of herself as a galley-slave. Then came a sudden change, and she began to write about *him*. You don't know the way a girl writes about *him*; the first him she has ever thought worthy to be written about. Her tone was

light enough at the beginning. She had met a young Irishman at a little evening party, and they had laughed together at Lausanne society. He was an officer, on furlough, full of wit and fun. I need not go into details. I saw her danger, and warned her; I reminded her that her father would never allow her to marry a subaltern in a marching regiment, and that such a marriage would mean starvation. Her father could give her nothing; it was incumbent on her to marry well, and with her attractions she had only to wait for a good offer. It would inevitably come in due time."

"She was handsome, I suppose? I know her face in the picture at Cheriton. My cousin bought all the old portraits."

"She was much handsomer than the picture. That was painted when she was only fifteen, but at seventeen her beauty had developed, and she was one of the most brilliant blondes I ever saw. Well, I suppose you know how useless my advice was. She ran away with her Irish admirer, and I heard no more of her for nearly four years, when I met her one afternoon in the Strand, and she took me home to her lodging in Cecil Street, and gave me some

tea. It was in October, and I stayed with her till dark, and then she insisted on seeing me off in the omnibus to Haverstock Hill, where I was then living in an artist's family. The lodgings were shabby, and she was shabbily dressed. She was as handsome as ever, but she looked worried and unhappy. Her husband had sold out of the army, and had a position as secretary to a West End club.

"She told me that they would have been pretty well off but for his extravagance. He was getting four hundred a year, and they had no children. She complained that it was her fate to be allied with spendthrifts. Her father had squandered his fortune; and her husband's improvident habits kept her in continual debt and difficulty. It grieved me to see the shabbiness of her surroundings—the squalid lodging-house parlour, without so much as a bunch of flowers or a stand of books to show that it was in the occupation of a lady. There was a cigar-box on the mantelpiece, and there was a heap of newspapers on the sofa, and a pair of shabby slippers inside the fender. It was a room to make one shudder. I asked her if she was reconciled to her father, and she said no; she had heard nothing

of him since her marriage. I felt very unhappy about her after we parted at Hungerford Market. I saw her standing on the pavement as the omnibus drove away, a tall, slim figure, distinguished-looking in spite of her shabby mantle and rusty black silk gown. I had promised to go and see her again, though I was very seldom at liberty at that time, and I went to Cecil Street two or three times in the course of the winter, but she was always out, and there was something in the tone of her letters that made me think she did not wish to see me again, though I believe she was fond of me always, poor soul. I saw nothing more of her, and heard nothing until nearly four years afterwards, when I was spending an afternoon at Richmond with my pupils —two girls of fourteen and sixteen—and I came face to face with her in front of Thomson's Seat. She was with a tall, handsome man, whom at first I took to be her husband: but there was something in the manner of both of them that impressed me uncomfortably, and I began to fear that this was not her husband. She looked much brighter than when I saw her in Cecil Street, and she was better dressed —very plainly, but in excellent taste. She took me

aside a little way while her companion stood and talked to the two girls. She put her arm through mine in her old caressing way, and then she said, abruptly, 'I almost wonder that you will speak to me. I thought you would cut me dead.' I looked puzzled, no doubt; so she said, 'Perhaps you don't know what a lost creature I am. Perhaps you have not heard.' I told her I had heard nothing about her since we parted at Hungerford Market, and then she gave a deep sigh, and said, 'Well, I am not going to deceive you. That,' with a jerk of her head towards the man who was standing with his back to us, 'is not my husband, but he and I are bound together for the rest of our lives, and we are perfectly happy together. Society would scorn us and trample upon us no doubt if we gave it a chance; but we don't. We live out of the world, and we live for one another. Now, aren't you shocked with me? Don't you want to run away?' she asked, with a little laugh, which sounded as if she was very nearly crying. I told her that I was very sorry for her. I could say no more than that. 'You would be sorrier still if you could picture to yourself the miserable life I led before I left my

husband,' she said. 'I bore it for five years, years that seemed an eternity. He cared for me no more than for the flower-girls in the street. He left me to pine in my dingy lodging, left me to be dunned and worried all day long, left me out-at-elbows, ashamed of my own shabbiness, while he amused himself at his club; and then he considered himself cruelly used when he found out there was another man in the world who thought me worth caring for, and when I told him I loved that man with all my heart. My leaving him was the impulse of a moment. The moment came when his brutality turned the scale, and I ran out of the house in my despair, and jumped into the first cab I could hail, and drove away to *him*,' pointing to the man in the distance, strolling beside my two gawky girls, 'and to happiness. I am a wicked wretch, no doubt, to be happy under such circumstances, but I am, or, at any rate, as happy as anybody can hope to be in this world. There is always a thorn among the flowers,' she sighed, as if the thorn was a big one, I thought. 'I suppose I shall never see you again,' she said. 'When we say good-bye presently, it will be farewell for ever.' I told her that was not in-

evitable. I was my own mistress, free to choose my friends. I told her that if ever she had need of a friend I would go to her. I felt that I was in some wise answerable for the bad turn her life had taken, for had I been a more judicious counsellor, I might have guided her better, might have prevented her coming into collision with her father. I asked her for her address, but she told me she had promised to tell nobody where she lived. 'We are living out of the world,' she said, 'we have no visitors, no friends or acquaintance.' She clasped my hands, kissed me, and hurried away to rejoin the man whose name I never learned. He lifted his hat to me and the girls, and they walked away together towards the Star and Garter, leaving us standing by Thomson's Seat, staring idly at the landscape in the summer sunlight. I felt dazed as I stood there, looking down into that lovely valley. It had been a terrible shock to me to meet her again under such circumstances."

## CHAPTER IV.

"Be useful where thou livest, that they may
Both want and wish thy pleasing presence still.
. . . . . All worldly joys go less
To the one joy of doing kindnesses."

"WHAT impression did the man make upon you in that brief meeting?" asked Theodore. "Did he strike you as a *roué?*

"No, that was the odd part of the business. He had the steady, respectable air of a bread-winner, a professional, or perhaps a commercial man. I could not tell which. There was nothing flashy or dissipated in his appearance. He looked me steadily in the face when he bowed to me at parting, and he had a frank, straight-forward expression, and a grave decision of manner that was not without dignity. He was soberly dressed in a style that attracted no attention. I had no doubt that he was a gentleman."

"He was handsome, you say?"

"Yes, he was decidedly handsome—but I can remember only the general character of his face, not features or details, for I saw him only twice in my life."

"Ah, you saw him again?"

"Once again—some years later, after her death."

"She is dead, then?" cried Theodore; "that is the fact I am most anxious to learn from a reliable source of information. There was a rumour of her death years ago, but no one could give me any evidence of the fact. I went to Boulogne last week to try and trace her to her last resting-place; but I could discover neither tombstone nor record of any kind."

"And yet it was at Boulogne she died. I will tell you all I know about her, if you like. It doesn't amount to much."

"Pray, tell me everything you can. I am deeply grateful to you for having treated me with so much frankness."

"It was on her account I received you. I am glad to talk to any one who is interested in her pitiful fate. There were so few to care for her. I think there is no lot more sad than that of a broken-down

gentleman's daughter, born to an inheritance she is never to enjoy, brought up to think of herself as a personage, with a right to the world's respect, and finding herself friendless and penniless in the bloom of her womanhood, exposed to the world's contumely."

Theodore's face flushed a little at this mention of his interest in the unhappy lady, for he could but feel that the interest was of a sinister kind; but he held his peace, and Miss Newton went on with her story.

"It was ever so many years after that meeting in Richmond Park—I think it must have been nearly ten years—when I ran against that very man upon a windy March day in Folkestone. I had thought much and often of my poor girl in all those years, wondering how the world had used her, and whether the lover whom she trusted so implicitly had been true to her. I shuddered at the thought of what her fate might have been if he were false. I had never heard a word about her in all that time. I had seen no report of a Divorce suit in the papers. I knew absolutely nothing of her history from the hour I parted with her by Thomson's Seat till I ran against

that man in Folkestone. I am rather shy about speaking to strangers in a general way; but I was so anxious to know her fate that I stopped this man, whose very name was unknown to me, and asked him to tell me about my poor friend. He looked bewildered, as well he might, at being pounced upon in that manner. I explained that I was Evelyn Strangway's old governess, and that I was uneasy at having lost sight of her for so many years, and was very anxious to see her again. He looked troubled at my question, and he answered me gravely—'I am sorry to say you will never do that. Your friend is dead.' I asked when she died, and where? He told me within the last month, and at Boulogne. I asked if he was with her at the last, and he said no; and then he lifted his hat and muttered something about having very little time to get to the station. He was going to London by the next train it seemed, and he was evidently anxious to shake me off—but I was determined he should answer at least one more question. 'Was her husband with her when she died?' I asked. His face darkened at the question, which I suppose was a foolish one. 'Do you think it likely?' he said, trying to move past

me; but I had laid my hand upon his sleeve in my eagerness. 'Pray tell me that her end was not unhappy—and that she was penitent for her sins.' He looked very angry at this. 'If I stand here talking to you another minute I shall lose my train, madam,' he said, 'and I have important business in London this afternoon.' A fly came strolling by at this moment. He hailed it and jumped in, and he drove off into what Thomas Carlyle would call the Immensities. I never saw him again; I never knew his name, or calling, or place of abode, or anything about him. I can no more localize him than I can Goethe's Mephistopheles. God knows how he treated my poor girl—whether he was kind or cruel; whether he was faithful to a dishonourable tie, or whether he held it as lightly as such ties have been held by the majority of men from Abraham downwards."

The little woman's face flushed and her eyes filled as she gave vent to her feelings.

"And this is all you know of Evelyn Strangway?" said Theodore, when she had finished.

"This is all I know of her. And now tell me why you are so anxious to learn her history—you

who can never have seen her face, except in the picture at Cheriton. I dressed her for that picture and sat by while it was painted."

"I will tell you the motive of my curiosity," answered Theodore. "You have treated me so frankly that I feel I must not withhold my confidence from you. I know that I can rely upon your discretion."

"I can talk, as you have just heard," said Miss Newton; "but I can be silent as the grave, when I like."

"You must have read something about the murder at Cheriton last July."

"I read a great deal about it. I took a morbid interest in the case, knowing the house so well in every cranny and corner. I could picture the scene as vividly as if I had seen the murdered man lying there. A most inexplicable murder, apparently motiveless."

"Apparently motiveless. That fact has so preyed upon the widow's mind that she has imagined a motive. She has a strange fancy that one of the Strangways must have been the author of the crime. She has brooded over their images till her whole

mind has become possessed with the idea of one of that banished race, garnering his wrath for long years, until at last the hour came for a bloody revenge, and then striking a death-blow out of the dark—striking his fatal blow and vanishing from the sight of men, as if a phantom arm had been stretched out of the night to deal that blow. She has asked me to help her in discovering the murderer, and I am pledged to do my utmost towards that end. I am the more anxious to do so as I tremble for the consequences if she should be allowed to brood long upon this morbid fancy about the Strangways. I think, however, that with your help I have now laid that ghost. I have traced the two brothers to their graves; and I suppose we may accept the statement of the man you met at Folkestone as sufficient evidence of Mrs. Darcy's death; especially as it seems to fit in with the account of the then Vicar of Cheriton, who met her in Boulogne in the summer of '64 looking very ill and much aged."

"It was in the spring of '65 I met that man at Folkestone. I could find the exact date in my diary if you wished to be very precise about it, for it is one of my old-maidish ways to be very regular in

keeping my diary. Poor Evelyn! To think that anyone should be mad enough to suspect her of being capable of murder—or Fred or Reginald. They had the Strangway temper, all three of them; and a fiery temper it was when it was roused, a temper that led to family quarrels and all sorts of unhappiness; but murder is a different kind of thing."

"That is the question," said Theodore gravely. "Is there such a wide gulf between the temper that makes family quarrels, sets father against son, and brother against brother, and the temper that pulls a trigger or uses a bowie-knife? I thought they were one and the same thing in actual quality, and that the result was dependent upon circumstances."

"Oh, don't talk like that please. Murder is something exceptional—a hideous solecism in nature—and in this case why murder? What had Sir Godfrey Carmichael done that any member of the Strangway family should want to kill him?"

"I tell you that the idea is a wild one, the morbid growth of my cousin's sorrow."

"Of course it is. I am very sorry for her, poor soul. I don't suppose any woman could suffer more

than she must have suffered. It is a dreadful story. And she was very fond of her husband, I daresay."

"She adored him. They had been lovers almost from her childhood. There never were a more devoted bride and bridegroom. Their honeymoon was not even beginning to wane. They were still lovers, still in a state of sweet surprise at finding themselves husband and wife. Poor girl, I saw her the day before the murder, a brilliant creature, the very spirit of joy. I saw her the morning after, a spectre, with awful eyes and marble face—more dreadful to look upon than her murdered husband."

"It is all too sad," sighed Miss Newton. "I begin to think that Cheriton is a fatal house, and that no one can be happy there. However, you can tell this poor lady that the Strangways are exonerated from any part in her misery."

"I shall write to her to-night to that effect. And now, Miss Newton, let me thank you once more for your friendly frankness, and wish you good night."

"Don't be in such a hurry, Mr. Dalbrook. I like your face, and I should like to see you again

some day, if you can find time to waste an hour upon an old maid in such a God-forsaken place as Wedgewood Street."

"I shall think an hour so spent most delightfully employed," answered Theodore, who was quite subjugated by the charm of this little person and her surroundings.

He did not remember having ever sat in a room he liked better than this first-floor front in Wedgewood Street, with its terra-cotta walls, prettily-bound books, curious oddments of old china, and comfortable curtains of creamy workhouse-sheeting, with a bold vermilion border worked by Sarah Newton's indefatigable fingers.

"I should very much like to hear all about your life in this—strange neighbourhood," he said.

"There is not much to tell. When my little fortune—left by my uncle, the drysalter—fell in to me I was a lonely old woman, without one surviving relative for whom I cared twopence. I was pretty tired of teaching French and German—God knows how many hundred times I must have gone through Ollendorff in both languages—and I've done him a good many times in Italian, *par dessus le marché*.

Perhaps I might have held on for a year or two longer, as I was very fond of those nice girls and boys at Kettisford Vicarage, if it hadn't been for Ollendorff. *He* decided me. Leila, the youngest girl, had only just begun that accursed book. She was blundering over 'the baker's golden candlestick' the very morning I got the lawyer's letter to tell me of my uncle's death, and the will, and the legacy. I snatched the book out of her hand, and shut it with a bang. 'Ain't I to do any more Ollendorff, Sally?' she asked. 'You may do as much as you like, my love,' I said, 'but you'll do no more with me. I'm a millionaire, or at least I feel as rich and independent as if I were a Rothschild.' Well, I lay awake all that night making plans for my life, and trying to think out how I could get the most comfort out of my little fortune, enjoy my declining years, have everything I wanted, and yet be of some use to my fellow-creatures; and the end of it was that I made up my mind to take a roomy lodging in a poor neighbourhood, where I should not be tempted to spend a penny upon appearances, furnish it after my own heart, and make myself happy in just my own way, without

caring a straw what anybody thought about me. I knew that I was plain as well as elderly, that I could never be admired, or cut a figure in the genteel world, so I determined to renounce the gentilities altogether and to be looked up to in a little world of my own."

"And you have found your plan answer——"

"It has answered beyond my hopes. Ever since I was thirty years of age and had finished with all young ideas and day-dreams, I had one particular ideal of earthly bliss, and that was the position of a country squire's wife—an energetic, active, well-meaning woman, the central figure in a rural village, having her model cottages and her allotment gardens, her infirmary, her mission-house—the good genius of her little community, a queen in miniature, and without political entanglements, or menace of foreign war. Now it could never be my lot to reign on a landed estate, to build cottages, or cut up fertile meadows for cottagers' gardens; but I thought by taking up my abode in a poor neighbourhood, and visiting in a friendly, familiar way—no tracts or preachings—among the most respectable of the inhabitants, and slowly feeling my way

among the difficult subjects, I might gradually acquire an influence just as strong as that of the Lady Bountiful in a country parish, and might come to be as useful in my small way as the squire's wife with her larger means. And I have done it," added Miss Newton triumphantly. "There are rooms in this street and in other streets that are to me my model cottages. There are overworked, underfed women who look up to me as their Providence. There are children who come and hang to my skirts as I pass along the streets. There are great hulking men who ask my advice and get me to write their letters for them. What could a squire's wife have more than that? And yet I have only a hundred and fifty pounds a year to spend upon my people."

"You give them something more than money. You give them sympathy—the magnetism of your strong and generous nature."

"Ah, there is something in that. Magnetism is a good word. There must be some reason why people attach themselves so ardently to Mr. Gladstone, don't you know, some charm in him that holds them almost in spite of themselves, and

makes them think as he thinks, and veer as he veers. Yes, they swing round with him like the boats going round with the tide, and they can't help it any more than the boats can. And I think, to compare small things with great, there must be some touch of that magnetic power in *me*," concluded Miss Newton.

"I am sure of it," said Theodore, "and I am sure, too, that you must be like a spot of light in this dark little world of yours."

"I live among my friends. That is the point," explained Miss Newton. "I don't come from Belgravia, or from a fashionable terrace in Kensington, and tell them they ought to keep their wretched rooms cleaner, and open their windows and put flower-pots on their window-sills. I live here, and they can come and see how I keep *my* rooms, and judge for themselves. Their landlord is my landlord; and a nice life I lead him about water, and whitewash, and drains. He is thoroughly afraid of me, I am happy to say, and generally bolts round a corner when he sees me in the street; but I am too quick for his over-fed legs. I tackle him about all his shortcomings, and he finds it easier to spend a

few pounds upon his property now and then than to have *me* upon his heels at every turn; so now Crook's tenements have quite a reputation in Lambeth. If you were to see the old dragon you would wonder at my pluck in attacking him, I can assure you."

"Your whole life is wonderful to me, Miss Newton; and I only wish there were hundreds of women in this big city living just as you live. Tell me, please, what kind of people your neighbours are.'

"Oh, there are people of all kinds, some of course who are quite impracticable, for whom I can do nothing; but there are many more who are glad of my friendship, and who receive me with open arms. The single women and widows are my chief friends, and some of those I know as well as if we had been brought up and educated upon the same social level. They are workwomen of all kinds, tailoresses, shirt-makers, girls who work for military outfitters, extra hands for Court dressmakers, shop-girls at the humbler class of shops, shoe-binders, artificial-flower-makers. I wonder whether you would like to see some of them."

"I should like it very much indeed."

"Then perhaps you will come to one of my tea-parties. I give two tea-parties a week all through the winter, to just as many of my women friends as this room will hold. It holds about twenty very comfortably, so I make twenty-five the outside limit. We rather enjoy a little bit of a crush—and I give my invitations so that they all have such pleasure as I can give them, fairly, turn and turn about. We do not begin our evening too early, for the working hours are precious to my poor things. We take tea at eight o'clock, and we seldom separate before half-past eleven—just as if we were at a theatre. We have a little music, a little reading and recitation, and sometimes a round game at cards. When we are in a wild humour we play dumb-crambo, or even puss-in-the-corner; and we have always a great deal of talk. We sit round this fire-place in a double semi-circle, the younger ones sitting on the rug in front of us elders, and we talk, and talk, and talk—about ourselves mostly, and you can't think what good it does us. Surely God gave man speech as the universal safety valve. It lets off half our troubles, and half our sense of the world's injustice."

"Please let me come to your very next party," said Theodore, smiling at the little woman's ardour.

"That will be to-morrow evening," replied Miss Newton. "I shall have to make an excuse for your appearance, as we very seldom invite a man. You will have to read or recite something, as a reason for your being asked, don't you know."

"I will not recoil even from that test. I have distinguished myself occasionally at a Penny Reading. Am I to be tragic—or comic?"

"Be both if you can. We like to laugh; but we revel in something that makes us cry desperately. If you could give us something creepy into the bargain, freeze our blood with a ghost or two, it would be all the more enjoyable."

"I will satiate you with my talents; I shall feel like Pentheus when he intruded upon his mother and her crew, and shall be humbly grateful for not being torn to pieces. I daresay I shall be torn to pieces morally, in the way of criticism. Good night, and a thousand thanks."

"Wait," said Miss Newton. "I'm afraid it is much foggier than when you came. I have smelt

the fog coming on while we have been talking. Wouldn't you like a cab?"

"I should very much, but I doubt if I shall succeed in finding one."

"*You* wouldn't, but I daresay I can get you one," replied Miss Newton, decisively.

She had an unobtrusive little chatelaine at her side, and from the bunch of implements, scissors, penknife, thimble, she selected a small whistle. Then she pulled back one of the cream-white curtains, opened the window, and whistled loud and shrill into the fog. Two minutes afterwards there came a small treble voice out of the darkness.

"What is it, Miss Newton?"

"Who's that?"

"Tommy Meadows."

"All right, Tommy. Do you think you could find a hansom without getting yourself run over?"

"Rather! Do you want it bringed to your door, Miss?"

"If you please, Tommy."

"I'm off," cried the shrill voice, and in less than ten minutes a two-wheeler rattled along the street, and drew up sharply at Tommy's treble command,

with Tommy himself seated inside, enjoying the drive and the uncertainty of the driver.

His spirits were still further exalted by the gift of sixpence from Theodore as he stepped into the cab, to be taken back to the Temple at a foot pace.

Even that sitting-room of his, which he had taken pains to make comfortable and home-like, had a gloomy look after that bright room in Lambeth, with its terra-cotta walls and cream-coloured curtains, its gaily-bound books and vivid Vallauris vases perched in every available corner. He was more interested in that quaint interior, and in the woman who had created it, than he had been in any one except that one woman who filled the chief place in all his thoughts. The Vicar of Kettisford had not over-estimated Sarah Newton's power of fascination.

He was in Wedgewood Street at a few minutes before eight on the following evening. The sky above Lambeth was no longer obscured; there were wintry stars shining over that forest of chimney pots and everlasting monotony of slated roofs; and even Lambeth looked lively with its costers' barrows and bustle of eventide marketing. Theodore found the

door open, as it had been yesterday, and he found an extra lamp upon the first floor landing, and the door of Miss Newton's room ajar, while from within came the sound of many voices, moderated to a subdued tone, but still lively.

His modest knock was answered by Miss Newton herself, who was standing close to the door, ready to greet every fresh arrival.

"How do you do? We are nearly all here," she said, cheerily. "I hope you have not just been dining, for with us tea means a hearty meal, and if you can't eat anything we shall feel as if you were Banquo's ghost. How do you do, Mrs. Kirby," to another arrival. "Baby better, I hope? Yes, that's right. How are you, Clara? and you, Rose? You've had that wretched tooth out—I can see it in your face. Such a relief, isn't it? So glad to see you, Susan Dale, and you, Maria, and you, Jenny. Why we are all here, I do believe."

"Yes, Miss Newton," said a bright-looking girl by the fire-place, who had been making toast indefatigably for twenty minutes, and whose complexion had suffered accordingly. "There are two-and-twenty of us, four-and-twenty, counting the gentle-

man and you. I think that's as many as you expected."

"Yes, everybody's here. So we may as well begin tea."

In most such assemblies where the intention was to benefit a humble class of guests, the proceedings would have begun with a hymn; but at Miss Newton's parties there were neither hymns nor prayers —and yet Miss Newton loved her hymn-book, and delighted in the pathos and the sweetness of the music with which those familiar words are interwoven; nor would she yield to anybody in her belief in the efficacy of prayer; but she had made up her mind from the beginning that her tea-parties were to be pure and simple recreation, and that any good which should come out of them was to come incidentally. The women and girls who came at her bidding were to feel they came to be entertained, came as her guests, just as, had they been duchesses, they might have gone to visit other duchesses in Park Lane or Carlton Gardens. They were not asked in order that they should be taught, or preached to, or wheedled into the praying of prayers or the singing of hymns. They went

as equals to visit a friend who relished their society.

And did not everybody relish the tea, which might be described as a Yorkshire tea of a humble order; not the Yorkshire tea which may mean mayonnaise and perigord pie, chicken and champagne—but tea as understood in the Potteries of Hull, or the humbler alleys and streets of Leeds or Bradford. Three moderate-sized tables had been put together to make one capacious board, spread with snowy damask, upon which appeared two large plum loaves, two tall towers of bread and butter, a glass bowl of marmalade, a bowl of jam, two dishes of thinly-sliced German sausage set off with sprigs of parsley—German sausage bought at the most respectable ham and beef shop in the Borough, and as trustworthy as German sausage can be; and for crowning glory of the feast a plentiful supply of shrimps, freshly boiled, savouring of the unseen sea. The hot buttered toast was frizzling on a brass footman in front of the fire, ready to be handed round piping hot, as required. There were two tea-trays, one at each end of the table, and there were two bright copper kettles, which had never been defiled by the smoke of the fire, filled with admirable tea.

Miss Newton took her place at the head of the table, with Theodore on her right hand, and a pale and fragile looking young woman on her left. These two assisted the hostess in the administration of the tea-tray, handing cups and saucers, sugar-basin and cream jug; and in so doing they had frequent occasion to look at each other.

Having gone there prepared to be interested, Theodore soon began to interest himself in this young woman, whom Miss Newton addressed as Marian. She was by no means beautiful now, but Theodore fancied that she had once been very handsome, and he occupied himself in reconstructing the beauty of the past from the wreck of the present.

The lines of the face were classic in their regularity, but the hollow cheeks and pallid complexion told of care and toil, and the face was aged untimely by a hard and joyless life. The eyes were darkest grey, large and pathetic-looking, the eyes of a woman who had suffered much and thought much. The beauty of those eyes gave a mournful charm to the pale pinched face, and the light auburn hair was still luxuriant. Theodore noted the delicate hands and taper fingers, which differed curiously from the

other hands which were busy around the hospitable board.

He could see that this young woman was a favourite with Sarah Newton, and he told himself that she was of a race apart from the rest; but he was agreeably surprised in finding that except for the prevailing Cockney accent, and a few slight lapses in grammar and pronunciation, Miss Newton's guests were quite as refined as those ladies of Dorchester with whom it had been his privilege to associate; indeed, he was not sure that he did not prefer the Cockney twang and the faulty grammar to the second-hand smartness and slang of the young ladies whose "Awfully jolly," "Ain't it," and "Don't you know," had so often irritated his ear on tennis lawn or at afternoon tea. Here at least there was the unstudied speech of people who knew not the caprices of fashion or the latest catch word that had descended from Belgravia to Brompton, and from Brompton to the provinces.

There was a great deal of talk, as Miss Newton had told him there would be; and as she encouraged all her guests to talk about themselves, he gathered a good deal of interesting information about the

state of the different trades and the ways and manners of various employers, most of whom seemed to be of a despotic and grasping temper. The widows talked of their children's ailments or their progress at the Board School; the girls talked a little, and with all modesty, of their sweethearts. Sarah Newton was interested in every detail of those humble lives, and seemed to remember every fact bearing upon the joys or the sorrows of her guests. It was a wonder to Theodore, to see how the care-worn faces lighted up round the cheerful table in the lamp-light. Yes, it was surely a good thing to live among these daughters of toil, and to lighten their burdens by this quick sympathy, this cheerful hospitality. Vast Pleasure Halls and People's Palaces may do much for the million; but here was one little spinster with her small income making an atmosphere of friendliness and comfort for the few, and able to get a great deal nearer to them than Philanthropy on a gigantic scale can ever get to the many.

Theodore noticed that while most other tongues babbled freely, the girl called Marian sat silent, after her task of distributing the tea was over, with hands

folded in her lap, listening to the voices round her, and with a soft slow smile lighting her face now and then. In repose her countenance was deeply sad, and he found himself speculating upon the history that had left those melancholy lines upon a face that was still young.

"I am much interested in your next neighbour," he said to Miss Newton, presently, while Marian was helping another girl to clear the table. "I feel sure there must be something very sad in her experience of life, and that she has sunk from a higher level."

"So do I," answered Miss Newton, "but I know very little more about her than you do, except that she is a most exquisite worker with those taper fingers of hers, and that she has worked for the same baby-linen house for the last three years, and has lived in the same second-floor back in Hercules' Buildings. I think she is as fond of me as she can be, yet she has never told me where she was born, or who her people were, or what her life has been like. Once she went so far as to tell me that it had been a very common-place life, and that her troubles had been in nowise extraordinary—except the fact of

her having had a very severe attack of typhus fever, which left her a wreck. Once from some chance allusion I learnt that it was in Italy she caught the fever, and that it was badly treated by a foreign doctor; but that one fact is all she ever let slip in her talk, so carefully does she avoid every mention of the past. I need hardly tell you that I have never questioned her. I have reason to know that her life for the last three years has been spotless, an industrious, temperate, Christian life, and that she is charitable and kind to those who are poorer than herself. That is quite enough for me, and I have encouraged her to make a friend of me in every way in my power."

"She is happy in having found such a friend, an invaluable friend to a woman who has sunk from happier surroundings."

"Yes, I think I have been a comfort to her. She comes to me for books, and we meet nearly every day at the Free Library, and compare notes about our reading. My only regret is that I cannot induce her to take enough air and exercise. She spends all the time that she can spare from her needlework in reading. But I take her for a walk

now and then, and I think she enjoys that. A penn'orth of the tramcar carries us to Battersea Park, and we can stroll about amongst grass and trees, and in sight of the river. She is better off than most of the girls in the way of getting a little rest after toil, for that fine, delicate needlework of hers pays better than the common run of work, and she is the quickest worker I know."

The tables were cleared by this time, and space had been made for that half-circle round the fire of which Miss Newton had spoken on the previous night. The younger girls brought hassocks and cushions, and seated themselves in the front rank, while their elders sat in the outer row of chairs.

Theodore was now called upon to contribute his share to the entertainment, and thereupon took a book from his pocket.

"You told me you and your friends were fond of creepy stories, Miss Newton," he said. "Is that really so?"

"Really and truly."

"And you are none of you afflicted with weak nerves—you are not afraid of being made uncomfortable by the memory of a ghastly story?"

"No. I think that with most of us the cares of life are too real and too absorbing to leave any room in our minds for imaginary horrors. Isn't it so, now, friends?"

"Lor, yes, Miss Newton," answered one of the girls, briskly: "we're all of us too busy to worry about ghosts; but I love a ghost tale for all that."

A chorus of voices echoed this assertion.

"Then, ladies, I shall have the honour of reading the 'Haunters and the Haunted,' by Bulwer Lytton."

The very title of the story thrilled them, and the whole party, just now so noisy with eager talk and frequent laughter, sat breathless, looking at the reader with awe-stricken eyes as that wonderful story slowly unwound itself.

Theodore read well, in that subdued and semi-dramatic style which is best adapted to chamber-reading. He felt what he read, and the horror of the imaginary scene was vividly before his eyes as he got deeper into the story.

The reading lasted nearly two hours, but it was not one moment too long for Theodore's audience,

and there was a sigh of regret when the last words of the story had been spoken.

"Well," exclaimed one young lady, "I do call that a first-class tale, don't you, Miss Newton?"

"You may go a long way without getting such a ghost tale as that," said another; "and don't the gentleman read beautifully, and don't he make one feel as if it was all going on in this very room? And the dog too! There, I never see such a thing! A poor dog to drop down dead, like that."

"I did hope that there dog would come to life again at the end," said one damsel.

By way of diversion after the story, Miss Newton opened her piano, beckoned three of the girls over to her, and played the symphony of "Blow, Gentle Gales," which old-fashioned glee the three girls sang with taste and discretion, the bass part being altered to suit a female voice. Then came some songs, all of which Miss Newton accompanied; and then at her request Theodore read again, this time selecting Holmes' "Wonderful One-Horse Shay," which caused much laughter; after which the little clock on the chimney-piece having struck eleven, he wished his hostess good-night, selected his coat and

hat from among the heap of jackets and hats on a table on the landing, and went downstairs.

He was still in Wedgewood Street when he heard light footsteps coming quickly behind him. It seemed to him that they were trying to overtake him, so he turned and met the owner of the feet.

"I beg your pardon, sir; forgive me for following you," said a very gentle voice, which he recognised as belonging to the girl called Marian, "I wanted so much to speak to you—alone."

"And I am glad of the opportunity of speaking to you," he answered. "I felt particularly interested in you this evening—there are some faces, you know, which interest us in spite of ourselves almost, and I felt that I should like to know more of you."

This was so gravely said that there was no possibility of an offensive construction being given to the words.

"You are very good, sir. It was your name that struck me," she answered, falteringly; "it is a Dorsetshire name, I think."

"Yes, it is a Dorsetshire name, and I am a Dorchester man."

"Dorchester," she repeated slowly. "I wonder whether you know a place called Cheriton?"

"I know it very well, indeed. A kinsman of mine lives there. Lord Cheriton is my cousin."

"I thought as much, directly I heard your name. You must know all about that dreadful murder, then—last summer?"

"Yes, I know about as much of it as any one knows, and that is very little."

"They have not found the murderer?" she asked, with a faint shudder.

"No, nor are they ever likely to find him, I believe. But tell me why you are interested in Cheriton. Do you come from that part of the country?"

"Yes."

"Were you born in Cheriton village?"

"I was brought up not far from there," she answered, hesitatingly.

He remembered what Miss Newton had told him of her own forbearance in asking questions, and he pursued the inquiry no further.

"May I see you as far as your lodgings?" he said, kindly. "It will be very little out of my way."

"No thank you, Mr. Dalbrook. I am too much accustomed to going about alone ever to want any escort. Good night, and thank you for having answered my questions."

Her manner showed a disinclination to prolong the interview, and she walked away with hurried steps which carried her swiftly into the darkness.

"Poor lonely soul," he said to himself. "Now, whose lost sheep is she, I wonder? She is certainly of a rank above a cottager's daughter, and with those hands of hers it is clear she has never been in domestic service. Not far from Cheriton? What may that mean? Not far is a vague description of locality. I must ask Lady Cheriton about her the next time I am at the Chase."

## CHAPTER V.

"A mind not to be changed by place or time."

Christmas at Dorchester was not a period of festivity to which Theodore Dalbrook had hitherto looked forward with ardent expectations, but in this particular December he found himself longing for that holiday season even as a schoolboy might long for release from Latin Grammar and suet pudding, and for the plenteous fare and idle days of home. He longed for the grave old town with its Roman relics and leafless avenues; longed for it, alas! not so much because his father, brother, and sisters dwelt there, as because it was within a possible drive of Milbrook Priory, and once being at Dorchester he had a fair excuse for going to see his cousin. Many and many a time in his chambers at the Temple he had felt the fever-fit so strongly upon him that he was tempted to put on his hat, rush out of those quiet courts and stony quadrangles to the bustle of

the Embankment, spring into the first hansom that came within hail, and so to Waterloo, and by any train that would carry him to Wareham Station, and thence to the Priory, only to look upon Juanita's face for a little while, only to hold her hand in his, once at greeting and once at parting, and then back into the night and the loneliness of his life, and law books and precedents, and Justinian and Chitty, and all that is commonplace and dry-as-dust in man's existence.

He had refrained from such foolishness, and now Christmas was at hand, his sisters were making the house odious with holly and laurel, the old cook was chopping suet for the traditional pudding which he had loathed for the last ten years, and he had a fair excuse for driving along the frosty roads to visit his widowed cousin. He had a pressing invitation from Lord Cheriton to spend two or three days of his holiday time at the Chase, an invitation which he had promptly accepted; but his first visit was to Lady Carmichael.

He found the house in all things unlike what it had been when last he saw it. The dear Grenvilles had been persuaded to spend their Christmas in

Dorsetshire, and the Priory was full of children's voices, and the traces of children's occupation. Theodore had known Jessica Grenville before her marriage, yet it was not the less a shock to find himself confronted by a portly matron and a brood of children in that room where he had seen Juanita's sad face bent over her embroidery. There was no trace of Juanita in the spacious drawing-room to-day, and the fact of her absence almost unhinged him, and put him at a disadvantage in his conversation with Mrs. Grenville, who received him with gracious loquacity, and insisted upon his giving an immediate opinion upon the different degrees of family likeness to be seen in her four children there present.

"These two are decided Carmichaels," she said, putting forward a rather flabby boy and a pudding-faced girl, "and the other two are thorough Grenvilles," indicating the latter and younger pair, who were seated on the floor building a Tower of Babel with a lately received present of bricks, and carrying out the idea by their own confusion of tongues.

Theodore felt glad he was not a Grenville if that was the type. He murmured some vague civility about the children, while he shook hands with Lady

Jane, who had come forward shyly to welcome him, almost obliterated by her more loquacious daughter.

"Don't you think Johnnie the very image of his poor dear uncle?" asked Mrs. Grenville urgently, a question which always agonized Lady Jane, who could not see the faintest likeness between her snub-nosed and bilious-looking grandchild and her handsome son.

Theodore was too nervous to be conscious of his own untruthfulness in replying in the affirmative. He was anxious to have done with the children, and to hear about his cousin.

"I hope Juanita is not ill?" he said.

"Oh, no, she is pretty well," replied Lady Jane, "but we keep her as quiet as we can, and of course the children are rather trying for her——"

"Nobody can say that they are noisy children," interjected the happy mother.

"So she seldom leaves her own rooms till the evening," continued Lady Jane. "You would like to see her at once, I daresay, Mr. Dalbrook? And I know she will be pleased to see you."

She rang, and told the footman to inquire if Lady

Carmichael was ready to see Mr. Dalbrook, and Theodore had to occupy the interval until the footman's return with polite attentions to the four children. He asked Lucy whence she had obtained those delightful bricks, thereby eliciting the information that the bricks were not Lucy's, but Godolphin's, only he "let her play with them," as he observed magnanimously. He was gratified with the further information that the tower now in process of elevation was not a church, but the Tower of Babel; and he was then treated to the history of that remarkable building as related in Holy Writ.

"*You* didn't know that, did you?" remarked Godolphin boastfully, when he had finished his narration in a harsh bawl, being one of those coarse brats whom their parents boast of as after the pattern of the infant Hercules.

The footman returned before Godolphin had wrung a confession of ignorance from the nervous visitor, and Theodore darted up to follow him out of the room.

He found Juanita reclining on a low couch near the fire in a dimly-lighted room, that room which

he remembered having entered only once before, on the occasion of an afternoon party at the Priory, when Sir Godfrey had taken him to his den to show him a newly acquired folio copy of Thomson's Seasons, with the famous Bartolozzi mezzotints. It was a good old room, especially at this wintry season, when the dulness of the outlook was of little consequence. The firelight gleamed cheerily on the rich bindings of the books, and on the dark woodwork, and fondly touched Juanita's reclining figure and the rich folds of her dark plush tea-gown.

"How good of you to come to see me so soon, Theodore," she said, giving him her hand. "I know you only came to Dorchester yesterday. The girls were here the day before, and told me they expected you."

"You did not think I should be in the county very long without finding my way here, did you, Juanita?"

"Well, no, perhaps not. I know what a true friend you are. And now tell me, have you made any further discoveries?"

"One more discovery, Juanita, as I told you briefly in my last letter. I have traced the Squire's

daughter to the sad close of a most unhappy life—and so ends the Strangway family as you know of their existence—that is to say, those three Strangways who had some right to feel themselves aggrieved by the loss of the land upon which they were born."

"Tell me all you heard from Miss Newton. Your letter was brief and vague, but as I knew I was to see you at Christmas I waited for fuller details. Tell me everything, Theodore."

He obeyed her, and related the bitter, commonplace story of Evelyn Strangway's life, as told him by her old governess. There were no elements of romance in the story. It was as common as the Divorce Court or the daily papers.

"Poor creature! Well, there ends my theory, at least about her," said Juanita gloomily. "Her brothers were dead, and she was dead, long before that fatal night. Did they bequeath their vengeance to any one else, I wonder? Who else is there in this world who had reason to hate my father or me? And I know that no creature upon this earth could have cause to hate my husband."

"In your father's calling there is always a possi-

bility of a deadly hate, inexplicable, unknown to the subject. Remember the fate of Lord Mayo. A judge who holds the keys of life and death must make many enemies."

"Yes," she sighed, "there is that to be thought of. Oh, my dearest and best, why did you ever link your life with that of a Judge's daughter? I feel as if I had lured him to his doom. I might have foreseen the danger. I ought never to have married. What right had I? Some discharged felon lay in wait for him—some relentless, Godless, hopeless wretch—whom my father had condemned to long imprisonment—whose angry heart my father had scorched with his seathing speech. I have read some of his summings up, and they have seemed cruel, cruel, cruel—so cold, so deliberate, so like a god making light of the sins of men. Some wretch, coming maddened out of his silent cell, and seeing my husband—that white, pure life, that brave, strong youth—prosperous, honoured, happy—seeing what a good man's life can be—lay in wait like a tiger, to destroy that happy life. If it was not one of the Strangways who killed him, it must have been such a man."

Her eyes shone, and her cheeks flushed with a feverish red. Theodore took her hand, held it in both his own, and bent to kiss the cold fingers—not with a lover's ardour, fondly as he loved; but with a calm and brotherly affection which soothed her agitated heart. He loved her well enough to be able to subjugate himself for her sake.

"My dear Juanita, if you would only withdraw your thoughts from this ghastly subject! I will not ask you to forget. That may be impossible. I entreat you only to be patient, to leave the chastisement of crime to Providence, which works in the dark, works silently, inevitably, to the end for which we can only grope in a lame and helpless fashion. Be sure the murderer will stand revealed sooner or later. That cruel murder will not be his last crime, and in his next act of violence he may be less fortunate in escaping every human eye. Or if that act is to be the one solitary crime of his life something will happen to betray him—some oversight of his own, or some irrepressible movement of a guilty conscience will give his life to the net, as a bird flies into a trap. I beseech you, dear, let your thoughts dwell

upon less painful subjects—for your own sake—for the sake——"

He faltered, and left his sentence unfinished, and Juanita knew that his sisters had told him something. She knew that the one hope of her blighted life, hope which she had hardly recognised as hope yet awhile, was known to him.

"I can never cease to think of that night, or to pray that God will avenge that crime," she said, firmly. "You think that is an unchristian prayer perhaps, but what does the Scripture say? 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.' Christ came to confirm that righteous law. Oh! it is well to be a humanitarian—to sign petitions against capital punishment—but let your nearest and dearest be murdered, and you will be quick to recognise the justice of that old inexorable law—a life for a life. That is what *I* want, Theodore—the life of the man who killed my husband."

"If I can help to bring about that end, Juanita, believe me that I will not shrink from the task; but at present I must own that I am off the track, and see no likelihood of succeeding where a trained detective has failed. Could I but find a shred of evidence

to put me on the trail, I would pursue that clue to the bitter end; but so far all is dark."

"Yes, all is dark!" she answered, dejectedly; and then, after a pause, she said, "You are going to stay at Cheriton, I hear?"

"I am to spend three days there at the turn of the year, just before I go back to London. I have chambers in Ferret-court, over the rooms in which your father spent the golden years of his youth, the years that made him a great man. It will be very interesting to me to hear him talk over those years, if I can beguile him into talking of himself, a subject which he so seldom dwells upon."

"Ask him if he ever made a bitter enemy. Ask him for his experience as a Judge at Assizes—find out, if you can, whether he ever provoked the hatred of a bad vindictive man."

"I will question your father, Juanita."

"Do! He will not let me talk to him about the one subject that occupies my mind. He always stops me on the threshold of any inquiries. He might surely help me to find the murderer, with his highly trained intellect, with his experience of the darkest side of human nature. But he will not

help me. He would talk more freely to you, no doubt."

"I will sound him," answered Theodore, and then he tried to beguile her into talking of other things —her home, her surroundings.

"It must be a comfort to you to have Lady Jane."

"A comfort! She is all that I have of happiness —all that reminds me of Godfrey. My mother and father are very dear to me—I hope you believe that, Theodore?—but our lives are parted now. My mother is wrapped up in her husband. Neither of them can sympathise with me as *his* mother can. Their loss is not the same as ours. We two are one in our grief."

"And she is a buffer between you and the outer world I see. She bears the burdens that would weigh you down. Those children, for instance—no doubt they are charming, as children go; but I fancy they would worry you if you had too much of them."

"They would kill me," said Juanita, smiling at him for the first time in their interview. "I am not very fond of children. It sounds unwomanly to

say so, but I often find myself wishing they could be born grown up. Fortunately, Lady Jane adores them. And I am glad to have the Grenvilles at Christmas time. I want all things to be as they would have been were my dearest here. I lie here and look round this room, which was his, and think and think, and think of him till I almost fancy he is here. Idle fancy! Mocking dream! Oh! if you knew how often I dream that he is living still, and that I am still his happy wife. I dream that he has been dead—or at least that we have all believed that he was dead—but that it was a mistake. He is alive; our own for long years to come. The wild rapture of that dream wakes me, and I know that I am alone. God keep you, Theodore, from such a loss as mine!"

"I must gain something before I can lose it," he answered, with a shade of bitterness. "I see myself, as the years go on, hardening into a lonely old bachelor, outliving the capacity for human affection."

"That is nonsense-talk. You think so just now, perhaps. There is no one beyond your own family you care for, and you fancy yourself shut out from

the romance of life—but your day will come, very suddenly, perhaps. You will see some one whom you can care for. Love will enter your life unawares, and will fill your heart and mind, and the ambition that absorbs you now will seem a small thing."

"Never, Juanita. I don't mean to plague you with any trouble of mine. You have given me your friendship, and I hope to be worthy of it; but pray do not talk to me of the chances of the future. My future is bounded by the hope of getting on at the Bar. If I fail in that I fail in everything."

"You will not fail. There is no reason you should not prosper in your profession as my father prospered. I often think that you are like him—more like him than you are like your own father."

Their talk touched on various subjects after this—on the great events of the world, the events that make history—on books and theatres, and then upon Sarah Newton, whose plan of life interested Juanita.

He told her of the girl called Marian, and her inquiries about Cheriton.

"I wonder if you ever knew her among your villagers," he said. "I should much like to know

who she is. She interests me more than I can say. There is a refinement in her manners and appearance that convinces me she must have belonged to superior people. She was never born in a labourer's cottage, or amidst a small shopkeeper's shabby surroundings. She was never taught at a National School, or broken into domestic service."

"And she was once very handsome, you say?"

"Yes, she must have been beautiful, before illness and trouble set their marks upon her face. She is only a wreck now, but there is beauty in the wreck."

"How old do you suppose her to be?"

"Eight or nine-and-twenty. It is difficult to guess a woman's age within two or three years, and this woman's face is evidently aged by trouble; but I don't think she can be thirty."

"There is only one person I can think of who would in any manner answer your description," said Juanita, thoughtfully.

"Who is that?"

"Mercy Porter. You must have heard about Mercy Porter, the daughter of the woman at the West Lodge."

"Yes, yes, I remember. She ran away with a middle-aged man—an army man—one of your father's visitors."

"I was a child at the time, and of course I heard very little about it. I only knew that Mercy Porter who used to come to tea with mother, and who played the piano better than my governess, suddenly vanished out of our lives, and that I never saw her again. My mother was quite fond of her, and I remember hearing of her beauty, though I was too young myself to know what beauty meant. I could not think any one pretty who wore such plain frocks, and such stout useful boots as Mercy wore. Her mother certainly did nothing to set off her good looks, or to instil vanity. Years after, my mother told me how the girl disappeared one summer evening, and how Mrs. Porter came distracted to the house, and saw my father, and stormed and raved at him in her agony, saying it was *his* friend who had blighted her daughter's youth—*his* work that she had gone to her ruin. He was very patient and forbearing with her, my mother said, for he pitied her despair, and he felt that he was in some wise to blame for having

brought such an unprincipled man as Colonel Tremaine to Cheriton, a man who had carried ruin into many homes. Mercy had been seen to leave Wareham Station with him by the night mail. He had a yacht at Weymouth. She wrote to her mother from London a fortnight afterwards, and Mrs. Porter brought the letter to my mother and father one morning, as they sat at breakfast. It was a heartbroken letter—the letter of a poor foolish girl who flings away her good name and her hope of Heaven, with her eyes open, and knows the cost of her sacrifice, and yet can't help making it. I was engaged to Godfrey when I first heard Mercy's story, and I felt so sorry for her, so sorry, in the midst of my happy love. What had I done to deserve happiness more than she, that life should be so bright for me and so dark for her. I did not know that my day of agony was to come."

"Did you ever hear how Colonel Tremaine treated her?"

"No! I believe my father wrote him a very severe letter, and called upon him to repair the wrong he had done; but I don't think he even took so much trouble as to answer that letter. His

regiment was ordered off to India two or three years afterwards, and he was killed in Afghanistan about six years ago."

"And has nothing been heard of Mercy since her flight?"

"Nothing."

"I wonder her mother has sat at home quietly all these years instead of making strenuous efforts to find her lost lamb," said Theodore.

"Ah, that is almost exactly what Godfrey said of her. He seemed to think her heartless for taking things so quietly. She is a curious woman—self-contained, and silent. I sometimes fancy she was more angry than grieved at Mercy's fate. Mother says she turns to ice at the slightest mention of the girl's name. Don't you think love would show itself differently?"

"One can never be sure about other people's sentiments. Love has many languages."

Their talk drifted to more common-place subjects. And then Theodore rose to take leave.

"You must dine at the Priory before your holiday is over, Theo," said his cousin, as they shook hands. "Let me see—to-morrow will be Christmas Day—

will you come the day after, and bring the sisters? It is too long a drive for a winter night, so you must stay, there is plenty of room."

"Are you sure we shall not bore you?"

"I am sure you will cheer me. My sister-in-law is very good—but Lady Jane is the only person in this house of whom I do not get desperately tired, including myself," she added, with a sigh. "Please say you will come, and I will order your rooms."

"We will come then. Good night, Juanita."

The shadows were falling as he drove away, after refusing tea in the drawing-room and a further acquaintance with the wonderful children.

He looked forward to that evening at the Priory with an eager expectancy that he knew to be supreme foolishness, and when the evening came, it brought some measure of disappointment with it. Juanita was not so well as she had been upon Christmas Eve. She was not able to dine downstairs, and the family dinner, at which the Etonian Tom, Johnnie, and Lucy were allowed to take their places in virtue of Christmas time, was a dull business for Theodore. His only pleasure was in the fact that he sat on Lady Jane's right hand, and was able to

talk with her of Juanita. Even that pleasure was alloyed with keenest pain; for Lady Jane's talk was of that dead love which cast its shadow over Juanita's youth, or of that dim and dawning hope which might brighten the coming days—and neither in the love of the past nor in the love of the future had Theodore any part. Juanita was on her sofa by the drawing-room fire when he and Mr. Grenville left the dining-room, after a single glass of claret, and a brief review of the political situation. Theodore's sisters were established on each side of her. There was no chance for him while they were absorbing her attention, and he retired disconsolately to the group in the middle of the room, where Mrs. Grenville and Lady Jane were seated on a capacious ottoman with the children about them.

Johnnie and Lucy, who had over-eaten themselves, were disposed to be quiet, the little girl leaning her fair curls and fat shining cheek against her grandmother's shoulder with an air that looked touching, but which really indicated repletion; Johnnie sprawling on the carpet at his mother's feet, and wishing he had not eaten *that* mince-pie, telling himself that, on the whole, he hated mince-pie, and envying his

brother Tom, who had stolen off to the saddle-room to talk to the grooms. Godolphin and Mabel having dined early, were full of exuberance, waiting to be "jumped," which entertainment Theodore had to provide without intermission for nearly half-an-hour, upheaving first one and then another towards the ceiling, first a rosy bundle in ruby velvet, and then a rosy bundle in white muslin, laughing, screaming, enraptured, to be caught in his arms, and set carefully on the ground, there to await the next turn. Theodore slaved at this recreation until his arms ached, casting a furtive glance every now and then at the corner by the fireplace where his sisters were treating Juanita to the result of their latest heavy reading.

At last, to his delight, Lucy recovered from her comatose condition, and began to thirst for amusement.

"Let's have magic music," she said, "we can all play at that, Granny and all. You know you love magic music, Granny. Who'll play the piano? Not mother, she plays so badly," added the darling, with child-like candour.

"Sophy shall play for you," cried Theodore, "she's a capital hand at it."

He went over to his sister.

"Go and play for the children, Sophy," he said. "I've been doing my duty. Go and do yours."

Sophy looked agonised, but complied; and he slipped into her vacant seat.

He sat by his cousin's side for nearly an hour, while the children, mother, and grandmother played their nursery game to the sound of dance-music, now low, now loud, neatly executed by Sophy's accurate fingers. Their talk was of indifferent subjects, and the lion's share of the conversation was enjoyed by Janet; but to Theodore it was bliss to be there, by his cousin's side, within sound of her low melodious voice, within touch of her tapering hand. Just to sit there, and watch her face, and drink in the tones of her voice, was enough. He asked no more from Fate, yet awhile.

He had a long talk with her in her own room next morning before he went back to Dorchester, and the talk was of that old subject which absorbed her thoughts.

"Be sure you find out all you can from my father," she said at parting.

Life at Cheriton Chase bore no impress of the

tragedy that had blighted Juanita's honeymoon. There were no festivities this winter; there was no large house-party. There had been a few quiet elderly, or middle-aged visitors during the shooting season, and there had been some slaughter of those pheasants which were wont to sit, ponderous and sleepy as barn-door fowls, upon the five-barred gates, and post-and-rail fences of the Chase. But even those sober guests—old friends of husband and wife—had all departed, and the house was empty of strangers when Theodore arrived there, in time for dinner on New Year's Eve. Nothing could have suited him better than this. He wanted to be *tête-à-tête* with Lord Cheriton; to glean all in the way of counsel or reminiscence that might fall from those wise lips.

"If there is a man living who can teach me how to get on in my profession it is James Dalbrook," he said to himself, thinking of his cousin by that name which he had so often heard his father use when talking of old days.

Lady Cheriton greeted him affectionately, made him sit by her in the library, where a richly-embroidered Japanese screen made a cosy corner by the fireplace,

during the twenty minutes before dinner. She was a handsome woman still, with that grand-looking Spanish beauty which does not fade with youth, and she was dressed to perfection in lustreless black silk, relieved by the glitter of jet here and there, and by the soft white crape kerchief, worn *à la* Marie-Antoinette. There was not one thread of grey in the rich black hair, piled in massive plaits upon the prettily shaped head. Theodore contemplated her with an almost worshipping admiration. It was Juanita's face he saw in those classic lines.

"I want to have a good talk with you, Theo," she said; "there is no one else to whom I can talk so freely now my poor Godfrey is gone. We sit here of an evening, now, you see. The drawing-room is only used when there are people in the house, and even then I feel miserable there. I cannot get his image out of my mind. Cheriton insists that the room shall be used, that it shall not be made a haunted room—and no doubt it is best so—but one cannot forget such a tragedy as that."

"I hope Juanita will forget some day."

"Ah, that is what I try to hope. She is so

young, at the very beginning of life, and it does seem hard that all those hopes for which other women live should be over and done with for her. I wish I could believe in the power of Time to cure her. I wish I could believe that she will be able to love somebody else as she loved Godfrey. If she does, I daresay it will be some new person who has had nothing to do with her past life. I had been in and out of love before I met James Dalbrook, but the sight of him seemed like the beginning of a new life. I felt as if it had been preordained that I was to love him, and only him—that nothing else had been real. Yes, Theodore," with a sigh, "you may depend if ever she should care for anybody, it will be a new person."

"Very lucky for the new person, and rather hard upon any one who happens to have loved her all his life."

"Is there any one—like that?"

"I think you know there is, Lady Cheriton."

"Yes, yes, my dear boy, I know," she answered kindly, laying her soft hand upon his. "I won't pretend not to know. I wish, with all my heart, you could make her care for you, Theodore, a year

or two hence. You would be a good and true husband to her, a kind father to Godfrey's child—that fatherless child. Oh, Theodore, is it not sad to think of the child who will never—not for one brief hour—feel the touch of a father's hand, or know the blessing of a father's love. Such a dead blank where there should be warmth and life and joy. We must wait, Theo. Who can dispose of the future? I shall be a happy woman if ever you can tell me you have won the reward of a life's devotion."

"God bless you for your goodness to me," he faltered, kissing the soft white hand, so like in form and outline to Juanita's hand, only plumper and more matronly.

They dined snugly, a cosy trio, in a small room hung with genuine old Cordovan leather, and adorned with Moorish crockery, a room which was called her Ladyship's parlour, and which had been one of Lord Cheriton's birthday gifts to his wife, furnished and decorated during her absence at a German spa. When Lady Cheriton left them the two men turned their chairs towards the fire, lighted their cigars, and settled themselves for an evening's talk.

The great lawyer was in one of his pleasantest

moods. He gave Theodore the benefit of his experience as a stuff-gown, and did all that the advice of a wise senior can do towards putting a tyro on the right track.

"You will have to bide your time," he said in conclusion; "it is a tedious business. You must just sit in your chambers and read till your chance comes. Always be there, that's the grand point. Don't be out when Fortune knocks at your door. She will come in a very insignificant shape on her earlier visits—with a shabby little two guinea brief in her hand; but don't you let that shabby little brief be carried to somebody else just because you are out of the way. I suppose you are really fond of the law."

"Yes, I am very fond of my profession. It is meat and drink to me."

"Then you will get on. Any man of moderate abilities is bound to succeed in any profession which he loves with a heart-whole love; and your abilities are much better than moderate."

There was a little pause in the talk while Lord Cheriton threw on a fresh log and lighted a second cigar.

"I have been meditating a good deal upon Sir Godfrey's murder," said Theodore, "and I am perplexed by the utter darkness which surrounds the murderer and his motive. No doubt you have some theory upon the subject."

"No, I have no theory. There is really nothing upon which to build a theory. Churton, the detective, talked about a vendetta—suggested poacher, tenant, tramp, gipsy, any member of the dangerous classes who might happen to consider himself aggrieved by poor Godfrey. He even went so far as to make a very unpleasant suggestion, and urged that there might be a woman at the bottom of the business, speculated upon some youthful intrigue of Godfrey's. Now, from all I know of that young man, I believe his life had been blameless. He was the soul of honour. He would never have dealt cruelly with any woman."

"And you, Lord Cheriton," said Theodore, hardly following the latter part of his cousin's speech in his self-absorption.

His kinsman started and looked at him indignantly.

"And you—in your capacity of judge, for instance—have you never made a deadly foe?"

"Well, I suppose the men and women I have sentenced have hardly loved me; but I doubt if the worst of them ever had any strong personal feeling about me. They have taken me as a part of the machinery of the law—of no more account than the iron door of a cell or a beam of the scaffold."

"Yet there have been instances of active malignity—the assassination of Lord Mayo, for instance."

"Oh, the assassin in that case was an Indian, and a maniac. We live in a different latitude. Besides, it is rather too far-fetched an idea to suppose that a man would shoot my son-in-law in order to avenge himself upon me."

"The shot may have been fired under a misapprehension. The figure seated reading in the lamplight may have been mistaken for you."

"The assassin must have been uncommonly short-sighted to make such a mistake. I won't say such a thing would be impossible, for experience has taught me that there is nothing in this life too strange to be true; but it is too unlikely a notion to dwell upon. Indeed, I think, Theodore, we

must dismiss this painful business from our minds. If the mystery is ever to be cleared up it will be by a fluke; but even that seems to me a very remote contingency. Have you not observed that if a murderer is not caught within three months of his crime he is hardly ever caught at all? I might almost say if he is not caught within one month. Once let the scent cool and the chances are a hundred to one in his favour."

"Yet Juanita has set her heart upon seeing her husband avenged."

"Ah, that is where her Spanish blood shows itself. An Englishwoman, pure and simple, would think only of her sorrow. My poor girl hungers for revenge. Providence may favour her, perhaps, but I doubt it. The best thing that can happen to her will be to forget her first husband, fine young fellow as he was, and choose a second. It is horrible to think that the rest of her life is to be a blank. With her beauty and position she may look high. I am obliged to be ambitious for my daughter, you see, Theodore, since Heaven has not spared me a son."

Theodore saw only too plainly that whatever

favour his hopes might have from soft-hearted Lady Cheriton, his own kinsman, James Dalbrook, would be against him. This mattered very little to him at present, in the face of the lady's indifference. One gleam of hope from Juanita herself would have seemed more to him than all the favour of parents or kindred. It was her hand that held his fate: it was she alone who could make his life blessed.

New Year's Day was fine but frosty, a sharp, clear day on which Cheriton Park looked loveliest, the trees made fairy-like by the light rime, the long stretches of turf touched with a silvery whiteness, the distant copses and boundary of pine-trees half hidden in a pale grey mist.

Theodore walked across the Park with Lady Cheriton to the eleven o'clock service in the church at the end of Cheriton village. It was nearly a mile from the great house to the fine old fifteenth-century church, but Lady Cheriton always walked to church in decent weather, albeit her servants were conveyed there luxuriously in a capacious omnibus specially retained for their use. On the way along the silent avenue Theodore told her of his meeting with Miss Newton's *protégée*, and of

Juanita's idea that the woman called Marian might be no other than Mercy Porter.

"I certainly remember no other case of a girl about here leaving her home under disgraceful circumstances—that is to say, any girl of refinement and education," said Lady Cheriton. "There have been cases among the villagers, no doubt; but if this girl of yours is really a superior person, and really comes from Cheriton, I think Juanita is right, and that you must have stumbled upon Mercy Porter. Her mother ought to be told about it, without delay."

"Will you tell her, or will you put me in the way of doing so?"

"Would you like to see Mrs. Porter?"

"Yes. I feel interested in her, chiefly because she may be Marian's mother. I shall have to go to work very carefully, so as not to cause her too keen a disappointment in the event of Juanita's guess being wrong."

"I do not know that you will find her very soft-hearted where her daughter is concerned," replied Lady Cheriton, thoughtfully. "I sometimes fear that she has hardened herself against that unhappy

girl. The troubles of her own early life may have hardened her, perhaps. It is not easy to bear a long series of troubles with patience and gentleness.

"Do you know much of her history?"

"Only that she lost her husband when she was still a young woman, and that she was left to face the world penniless with her young daughter. If my husband had not happened to hear of her circumstances Heaven knows what would have become of her. He had been intimate with her husband when he was a young man in London, and it seemed to him a duty to do what he could for her; so he pensioned off an old gardener who used to live in that pretty cottage, and he had the cottage thoroughly renovated for Mrs. Porter. She had a little furniture of a rather superior kind warehoused in London, and with this she was able to make a snug and pretty home for herself, as you will see if you call upon her after the service. You are sure to see her at church."

"Was she very fond of her little girl in those days?"

"I hardly know. People have different ways of showing affection. She was very strict with poor

Mercy. She educated her at home, and never allowed her to associate with any of the village children. She kept the child entirely under her own wing, so that the poor little thing had actually no companion but her mother, a middle-aged woman, saddened by trouble. I felt very sorry for the child, and I used to have her up at the house for an afternoon now and then, just to introduce some variety into her life. When she grew up into a beautiful young woman her mother seemed to dislike these visits, and stipulated that Mercy should only come to see me when there were no visitors in the house. She did not want her head turned by any of those foolish compliments which frivolous people are so fond of paying to a girl of that age, never thinking of the mischief they may do. I told her that I thought she was over-careful, and that as Mercy must discover that she was handsome sooner or later, it was just as well she should gain some experience of life at once. Her instinctive self-respect would teach her how to take care of herself; and if she could be safe anywhere, she would be safe with me. Mrs. Porter is a rather obstinate person, and she took her own way. She kept Mercy as close as

if she had been an Oriental slave; and yet, somehow, Colonel Tremaine contrived to make love to her, and tempted her away from her home. Perhaps if that home had been a little less dismal the girl might not have been so easily tempted."

They had left the park by this time and were nearing the church. A scanty congregation came slowly in after Lady Cheriton and her companion had taken their seats in the chancel pew. The congregation was chiefly feminine. Middle-aged women in everyday bonnets and fur-trimmed cloaks, with their shoulders up to their ears. Girls in felt hats and smart, tight-fitting jackets. A few pious villagers of advanced years, spectacled, feeble, with wrinkled faces half hidden under poke bonnets: two representative old men with long white hair and quavering voices, whose shrill treble was distinguishable above the rustic choir.

Amidst this sparse congregation Theodore had no difficulty in discovering Mrs. Porter.

She sat in one of the front benches on the left side of the aisle, which side was reserved for the tradespeople and humbler inhabitants of Cheriton; while the benches on the right were occupied by the

county people, and some small fry who ranked with those elect of the earth—with them, but not of them—a retired banker and his wife, the village doctor, the village lawyer, and two or three female annuitants of good family.

A noticeable woman, this Mrs. Porter, anywhere. She was tall and thin, straight as a dart, with strongly marked features and white hair. Her complexion was pale and sallow, the kind of skin which is generally described as sickly. If she had ever been handsome all traces of that former beauty had disappeared. It was a hard face, without womanly charm, yet with an unmistakable air of refinement. She wore her neat little black straw bonnet and black cloth mantle like a lady, and she walked like a lady, as Theodore saw presently, when that portion of the little band of worshippers which did not remain for the celebration dribbled slowly out of church.

He left Lady Cheriton kneeling in her pew, and followed Mrs. Porter out of the porch and along the village street, and thence into that rustic lane which led to the West Lodge. He had spoken to her only once in his life, on a summer morning, when he had

happened to find her standing at her garden gate, and when it had been impossible for her to avoid him. He knew that she must have seen him going in and out of the park gates often enough for his appearance to be familiar to her, so he had no scruple in introducing himself.

"Good morning, Mrs. Porter," he said, overtaking her in the deeply sunk lane, between those rocky banks where harts-tongue and polypodium grew so luxuriantly in summer, and where even in this wintry season the lichens and mosses spread their rich colouring over grey stone and brown earth, and above which the snow-laden boughs showed white against the blue brightness of the sky.

She turned and bowed stiffly.

"Good morning, sir."

"You haven't forgotten me, I hope. I am Theodore Dalbrook, of Dorchester. I think you must have seen me pass your window too often to forget me easily?"

"I am not much given to watching the people who pass in and out, sir. When his Lordship gave me the cottage he was good enough to allow me a servant to open the park gate, as he knew that I was

not strong enough to bear exposure to all kinds of weather. I am free to live my own life therefore, without thinking of his Lordship's visitors."

"I am sorry to intrude myself upon your notice, Mrs. Porter, but I want to speak to you upon a very delicate subject, and I must ask your forgiveness in advance if I should touch upon an old wound."

She looked at him curiously, shrinkingly even, with a latent anger in her pale eyes, eyes that had been lovely once, perhaps, but which time or tears had faded to a glassy dulness.

"I have no desire to discuss old wounds with any one," she said coldly. "My troubles at least are my own."

"Not altogether your own, Mrs. Porter. The sorrow of which I am thinking involves another life —the life of one who has been dear to you."

"I have nothing to do with any other life."

"Not even with the life of your only child?"

"Not even with the life of my only child," she answered doggedly. "She left me of her own accord, and I have done with her for ever. I stand utterly alone in this world, utterly alone," she repeated.

"And if I tell you that I think and believe I have found your daughter in London—very poor—working for her living, very sad and lonely, her beauty faded, her life joyless—would you not wish to know more—would not your heart yearn towards her?"

"No! I tell you I have done with her. She has passed out of my life. I stand alone."

There was a tone of finality in these words which left no room for argument.

Theodore lifted his hat, and walked on.

## CHAPTER VI.

"O sovereign power of love! O grief! O balm!
All records, saving thine, come cool, and calm,
And shadowy, through the mist of passed years."

Harrington Dalbrook, having in a manner given hostages to Fortune, entered upon his new career with a strength of purpose and a resolute industry which took his father by surprise.

"Upon my word, Harry, I did not think there was so much grit in you," said Mr. Dalbrook. "I thought you and your sisters were too much stuffed with modern culture to be capable of old-fashioned work."

"I hope, my dear father, you don't think education and intellect out of place in a lawyer?"

"Far from it. We have had too many examples to the contrary, from Bacon to Brougham, from Hale to Cockburn; but I was afraid of the dilettante spirit, the talk about books which you had only half

read, the smattering of subjects that need the work of a lifetime to be properly understood. I was afraid of our modern electro-plate culture—the process which throws a brilliant film of education over a foundation of ignorance. However, you have surprised me, Harry. I own that I was disappointed by your want of purpose at the University; but I begin to respect you now I find you attack your work in the right spirit."

"I want to get on," answered Harrington gravely, hanging his head a little in shame at his own reticence.

From so good a father he felt it was a kind of dishonour to keep a secret; but Juliet Baldwin had insisted upon secrecy, and the name of every *fiancée* in the early stages of an engagement is She-who-must-be-obeyed.

Harrington said not a word, therefore, as to that mighty prime-mover which was urging him to dogged perseverance in a profession for which he had as yet no real inclination. He put aside Darwin and Spencer, Max Müller and Seeley, Schopenhauer and Hartmann, all those true or false lights which he had followed through the mazes of free thought;

and he set himself to master the stern actualities of the law. He had not done well at the University; not because he was wanting in brains, but because he was wanting in concentration and doggedness. The prime-mover being supplied, and of a prodigious power, Harrington brought his intellectual forces to bear upon a given point, and made a rapid advance in legal knowledge and acumen. The old cook-housekeeper complained of the coals and candles which "Master Harry" consumed during his after-midnight studies, and wondered that the household were not all burnt in their beds by reason of the young gentleman dropping off to sleep over Coke upon Littleton. The sisters complained that they had now practically no brother, since Harrington, who had a pretty tenor voice, and had hitherto been a star at afternoon teas and evening parties, refused to go anywhere, except to those few houses—county—where Miss Baldwin might be met.

Scarcely had the New Year begun when Miss Baldwin went off upon a visit to one of the largest houses in Wiltshire, and one of the smartest, a house under the dominion of a childless widow, gifted with a large income and a sympathetic tem-

perament, a lady who allowed her life to be influenced and directed by a family of nephews and nieces, and whose house was declared by the advanced section of society to be "quite the most perfect house to stay in, don't you know."

Miss Baldwin did not leave the neighbourhood of Dorchester and her lover without protestations of regret. The thing was a bore, a sacrifice on her part, but it must be done. She had promised dear old Lady Burdenshaw ages ago, and to Lady Burdenshaw's she must go.

"You needn't worry about it," she said, with her off-hand air, lolling on the billiard-room settee in the grey winter afternoon, on the second Sunday of the year; "if you are at all keen upon being at Medlow Court while I am there, I'll make dear old Lady Burdenshaw send you an invitation."

"You are very good," replied Harrington, "and I should like staying in the same house with you; but I couldn't think of visiting a lady I don't know, or of cadging for an invitation."

Sir Henry had asked his friend to luncheon, and now, after a somewhat Spartan meal of roast mutton and rice pudding, the lovers were alone in the bil-

liard-room, Sir Henry having crept off to the stables. The table was kept rigorously covered on Sundays, in deference to the Dowager's Sabbatarian leanings; and there was nothing for her son to do in the billiard-room, except to walk listlessly up and down and stare at some very dingy examples of the early Italian school, or to take the cues out of the rack one by one to see which of them wanted topping.

"Oh, but you needn't mind. You would be capital friends with Lady B. We all call her Lady B., because a three syllable-name is too much for anybody's patience. I tell her she ought to drop a syllable. Lady Bur'shaw would do just as well. I suppose though if I were to get an invitation you could hardly be spared from—the shop," concluded Juliet, with a laugh.

"Hardly. I have to stick very close to—the shop," replied Harrington, blushing a little at the word. "Remember what I am working for—a family practice in London and a house that you need not be ashamed to inhabit. To me that means as much as the red ribbon of the Bath means to a soldier or sailor. My ambition goes no further, unless it were to a seat in Parliament later on."

"You are a good earnest soul. Yes, of course, you must go into Parliament. In spite of all the riff-raff that has got into the House of late years, boys, Home Rulers, city-men, there is a faint flavour of distinction in the letters M.P. after a man's name. It helps him just a little in society to be able to talk about 'my constituents,' and to contemplate European politics from the standpoint of the town that has elected him. Yes, you must be in the House, by-and-bye, Harry."

"You told me you were tired of country house visiting," said Harrington, who for the first time since his betrothal felt somewhat inclined to quarrel with his divinity.

"So I am, heartily sick of it; and I shall rejoice when I have a snug little nest of my own in Clarges or Hertford Street. But you must admit that Medlow Court is better than this house. Behold our average Sunday! Roast mutton—rice pudding—and invincible dulness; all the servants except an under-footman gone to afternoon church, and no possibility of a cup of tea till nearly six o'clock. A cold dinner at eight, and family prayers at ten."

"What kind of a Sunday do you have at Medlow?"

"*Il y'en a pour tous les gouts.* Medlow is liberty hall. If we were even to take it into our heads to have family prayers Lady Burdenshaw would send for her chaplain—pluck him out of the bosom of his family—and order him to read them. She doesn't *like* cards on a Sunday, because of the servants; but after the clock has struck eleven we may do what we please—play poker, nap, euchre, baccarat, till daylight, if we are in the humour. The billiard and smoke rooms, and the ball-room are at one end of the house, ever so far from the servants' quarters. We can have as much fun as we like while those rustic souls are snoring."

Harrington sighed ever so faintly. This picture of a fashionable interior was perfectly innocent, and his betrothed's way of looking at things meant nothing worse than girlish exuberance, fine animal spirits: but the *sans gêne* of Medlow Court was hardly the kind of training he would have chosen for his future wife. And then he looked at the handsome profile, the piled-up mass of ruddy-brown hair on the top of the haughtily poised head, the per-

fectly fitting tailor gown, with its aristocratic simplicity, costing so much more than plebeian silks and satins; and he told himself that he was privileged in having won such exalted beauty to ally itself with his humble fortunes. Such a girl would shine as a duchess; and if marriageable dukes had eyes to see with, and judgment to guide their choice, that lovely auburn head would ere now have been crowned with a tiara of family diamonds instead of waiting for the poor sprigs of orange blossom which alone may adorn the brow of the solicitor's bride.

"Shall we go for a stroll in the grounds?" asked Juliet, with a restless air, and an impatient shiver. "Perhaps it will be warmer out of doors than it is here. We keep such miserable fires in this house. I believe the grates were chosen with a view to burning the minimum of coal."

"I shall be delighted."

Laura was absent on a visit to Yorkshire cousins, strong-minded like herself, and with no pretensions to fashion. Lady Baldwin had retired for her afternoon siesta. On Sundays she always read herself to sleep with Taylor or South; on week-days she nodded over the morning paper. She had gone to

the morning-room with the idea that Henry would take his friend to the stables, and that Juliet would require no looking after. It had never entered into her ladyship's head that her handsome daughter would look so low as the son of her solicitor. Juliet was therefore free to do what she pleased with her afternoon, and her pleasure was to walk in the chilly shrubberies, and the bare grey park, sparsely timbered, and with about as little forestal beauty as a gentleman's park can possess.

She put on an old seal-skin jacket and a toque to match, which she kept in the room where her brother kept his overcoats, and which smelt of tobacco, after the manner of everything that came within Sir Henry's influence. And then she led the way to a half-glass door, which opened on a grass-plot at the side of the house, and she and her lover went out.

"You can smoke if you like," she said. "You know I don't mind. I'll have a cigarette with you in the shrubbery."

"Dearest Juliet, I can't tell you how glad I should be if you would smoke—less," he said nervously, blushing at his own earnestness.

"You think I smoke too many cigarettes—that they are really bad for me?" she asked carelessly.

"It isn't that. I wasn't thinking about their effect on your health; but—I know you will call it old-fashioned nonsense—I can't bear to see the woman who is to be my wife with a cigarette between her lips."

"And when I am your wife, I suppose you will cut me off from tobacco altogether."

"I should never be a domestic tyrant, Juliet—but it would wound me to see my wife smoke, just as much as it wounds me now when I see you smoke half-a-dozen cigarettes in succession."

"What a Philistine you are, Harry! Well, you shall not be tortured. I'll ease off the smoking if I can—but a whiff or two of an Egyptian soothes me when my nerves are overstrained. You are as bad as my mother, who thinks cigarette smoking one stage on the road to perdition, and rather an advanced stage, too. You are very easily shocked, Harry, if an innocent little cigarette can shock you. I wonder if you are really fond of me, now the novelty of our engagement has worn off?"

"I am fonder of you every day I live."

"Enthusiastic boy! If that is true you may be able to stand a worse shocker than my poor little cigarette."

Harrington turned pale, but he took the hand which she held out to him, and grasped it firmly. What was she going to tell him?

"Harry, I want to make a financial statement. I want you to help me if you can. I am up to my eyes in debt."

"In debt?"

"Yes. It sounds bad, don't it? Debt and tobacco should be exclusively masculine vices. I owe money all round—not large sums—but the sum-total is large. I have had to hold my own in smart houses upon an allowance which some women would spend with their shoemaker. My mother gives me a hundred and twenty-five pounds a year for everything, tips, travelling expenses, clothes, music—and I am not going to say anything unkind about her on that score, for I don't see how she could give me more. Her own means come to something under eighteen hundred a year, and she has this place to keep up. Henry takes all the rents, and often keeps her waiting for her income,

which is a first charge upon the estate. If it were not for your father, who looks after her interests as sharply as he can, she might fare much worse. Henry brings as many men as he likes here, and contributes nothing to the housekeeping."

"And you owe money to milliners and people?" said Harrington, deeply distressed by his sweetheart's humiliation, which he felt more keenly than the lady herself.

Juliet had lived among girls who talked freely of their debts and difficulties, of sops to Cerberus, and getting round an unwilling dressmaker. Harrington's lines had been set among old-fashioned countrified people, to whom debt—and especially feminine indebtedness—meant disgrace. He had come back from the University feeling like a murderer, because he had exceeded his allowance.

"Milliners, dressmakers, shoemakers, hatters—and ever so many more. I am afraid I have been rather reckless—only—I thought——"

"I thought I should make a great match," she would have said, had she followed her idea to its close, but she checked herself abruptly, and cut off a sprig of yew with a swing of the stick she carried.

"If I can help you in any way——" began Harrington.

"My dear boy, there is only one way in which you can help me. Lend me any money you can spare, say fifty pounds, and I will give it you back by instalments of ten or fifteen pounds a quarter. It would be mockery for me to pretend I could pay you in a lump sum, now I have told you the extent of my income."

Harrington's worldly wealth at that moment was something under fifty pounds. His father had given him a cheque for fifty on Christmas Eve, and he had no right to expect anything more till Lady Day; while he had to think of the black horse who was steadily eating his head off at livery, and for whom nothing had been paid as yet.

He could not find it in his heart to tell his affianced that he was, comparatively speaking, a pauper. He knew that his father had the reputation of wealth, a man always ready to invest in any odd parcel of land that was in the market, and who was known to possess a good many small holdings and houses in his native town and its neighbourhood. Could he tell her that her future husband

was still in leading strings, and that the run of his teeth and fifty pounds a quarter were all he could count upon till he was out of his articles? No, he would rather perish than reveal these despicable facts; so, although he had only forty-three pounds odd in his little cash-box, he told her that he would let her have fifty pounds in a day or two.

"If you could manage to bring it me to-morrow I should be very glad," said Juliet, who, once having broken the ice, talked about the loan with easy frankness. "I must have a new frock for the ball at Medlow. They are to have a ball on the first of February, the ball of the year. There will be no end of smart people. I want to send Estelle Dawson thirty-five or forty pounds, about half the amount of her last bill. It's a paltry business altogether. I know girls who owe their dressmakers hundreds where I owe tens. Let me have the cash to-morrow if you can, there's a dear. Miss Dawson is sure to be full of work for the country at this season, and she won't make my frock unless I give her a week's notice."

"Of course, dear, yes, you shall have the money," Harrington answered nervously; "but

your white gown at our ball looked lovely. Why shouldn't you wear that at Medlow?"

"My white gown would be better described as black," retorted the young lady with marked acidity. "If I didn't hate the Dorchester people like poison I wouldn't have insulted them by wearing such a rag. I would no more appear in it at Medlow than I would cut my throat."

Language so strong as this forbade argument. Harrington concluded that there was a mystery in these things outside the limits of masculine understanding. To his eye the white satin and tulle his betrothed had worn had seemed faultless; but it may be that the glamour of first love acts like limelight upon a soiled white garment; and no doubt Miss Baldwin's gown had seen service.

He walked back to the house with her, and left her at the door just as it was growing dusk, and the servants were coming home from church. He left her with a fictitious appearance of cheerfulness, promising to go to tea on the following afternoon.

He was glad of the six-mile walk to Dorchester, as it gave him solitude for deliberation. At home the keen eyes of his sisters would be upon him,

and he would be pestered by inquiries as to what there had been for lunch and what Miss Baldwin wore; while the still more penetrating gaze of his father would be quick to perceive anything amiss.

"Oh, Juliet, if you knew how hard you are making our engagement to me," he ejaculated mentally, as he walked, with the unconscious hurry of an agitated mind, along the frost-bound road.

There had been a hard frost since Christmas, and hunting had been out of the question, whereby the existence of Mahmud, and the bill at the livery stable seemed so much the heavier a burden.

Somehow or other he must get the difference between forty-three pounds and fifty, only seven pounds, a paltry sum, no doubt; but it would hardly do for him to leave himself penniless until Lady-day. He might be called on at any moment for small sums. Short of shamming illness and stopping in bed till the end of the quarter, he could not possibly escape the daily calls which every young man has upon his purse. He told himself, therefore, that he must contrive to borrow fifteen or twenty pounds. But of whom? That was the question.

His first thought was naturally of his brother—but in the next moment he remembered how Theodore in his financial arrangements with his father had insisted upon cutting himself down to the very lowest possible allowance.

"You will pay all my fees, Dad, and give me enough money to furnish my chambers decently, with the help of the things I am to have out of this house, and you will allow me so much," he said, naming a very modest sum, "for maintenance till I begin to get briefs. I want to feel the spur of poverty. I want to work for my bread. Of course I know I have a court of appeal here if my exchequer should run dry."

Remembering this, Harrington felt that he could not, at the very beginning of things, pester his brother for a loan. The same court of appeal, the father's well-filled purse, was open to him, but he had no excuse to offer, no reason to give, for exceeding his allowance.

He might sell Mahmud, if there were not two obstacles to that transaction. The first that nobody in the neighbourhood wanted to buy him, the second that he was not yet paid for, except by that bill

which rose like a pale blue spectre before the young man's eyes as he was dropping off to sleep of a night, and sometimes spoiled his rest. He would have to sell Mahmud in order not to dishonour that bill; and if the horse should fetch considerably less than the price given for him, as all equine experience led his owner to fear, whence was to come the difference? That was a problem which would have to be solved somehow before the tenth of March. He would have to send the beast to Tattersall's most likely, the common experience of the hunting field having taught him that nobody ever sells a horse among his own circle. He saw himself realising something under fifty pounds as the price of the black, and having to bridge over the distance between that amount and eighty, as best he might. But March was not to-morrow, and he had first of all to provide for to-morrow; a mere trifle, but it would have to be borrowed, and the sensation of borrowing was new to Matthew Dalbrook's son. He had frittered away his ready money at the University, and he had got into debt; but he had never borrowed money of Jew or Gentile. And now the time had

come when he must borrow of whomsoever he could.

He took tea with his sisters in the good, homely, old-fashioned drawing-room, which was at its best in winter; the four tall, narrow windows closely curtained, a roaring fire in the wide iron grate, and a modern Japanese tea table wheeled in front of it. Five o'clock tea was of a more substantial order on Sundays than on week days, on account of the nine o'clock supper which took the place of the seven o'clock dinner, and accommodated those who cared to attend evening church. Lady Baldwin's Spartan luncheon had not indisposed her guest for cake and muffins, and basking in the glow of the fire Harrington forgot his troubles, enjoyed his tea, and maintained a very fair appearance of cheerfulness while his sisters questioned and his father put in an occasional word.

"I'm afraid you are getting rather too friendly at the Mount," said Matthew Dalbrook. "I don't like Sir Henry Baldwin, and I don't think he's an advantageous friend for you."

"Oh, but we're old chums," said Harrington,

blushing a little; "we were at Oxford together, you know."

"I'm afraid we both know it, Harry, and to our cost," replied his father. "You might have succeeded in your divinity exam. if it hadn't been for this fine gentleman friend of yours."

"I'm not sorry I failed, father. The law suits me ever so much better than the Church."

"So long as you stick to that opinion I'm satisfied. Only don't go to the Mount too often, and don't let the handsome Miss Baldwin make a fool of you."

If it had not been for the coloured shades over the lamps, which were so artistic as to be useless for seeing purposes, Harrington might have been seen to turn pale.

"No fear of that," Sophia exclaimed, contemptuously. "Juliet Baldwin is not likely to give a provincial solicitor any encouragement. She's a girl who expects to marry for position, and though she is just a shade *passée* she may make a good match even yet. She comes here because she likes *us*, but she's a thorough woman of the world, and you needn't be afraid of her running after Harry."

Harrington grew as red as a peony with suppressed indignation.

"Perhaps as the Baldwins are my friends you might be able to get on without talking any more about them," he said, scowling at his elder sister. "I've told you what we had for lunch, and how many servants were in the room, and what kind of gown Juliet—Miss Baldwin—was wearing. Don't you think we've had enough of them for to-night?"

"Quite enough, Harry, quite enough," said the father. "By-the-by, did you read the *Times* leader on Gladstone's last manifesto? And where are the *Field* and the *Observer?* Bring me over a lamp that I can see by, Sophy, my dear. Those crimson lamp shades of yours suggest one of Orchardson's pictures, but they don't help me to read my paper."

"They're the beastliest things I ever saw," said Harrington vindictively.

"I'm sorry you don't like them," said Janet. "It was Juliet Baldwin who persuaded us to buy them. She had seen some at Medlow Court, and she raved about them."

Harrington went out of the room without another

word. How odious his sisters had become of late; yet while he was at Oxford they had regarded him as an oracle, and he had found even sisterly appreciation pleasant.

It was some time since he had attended evening service, but on this particular evening he went alone, not troubling to invite his sisters, who were subject to an intermittent form of neuralgia which often prevented their going to church in the evening. To-night he avoided St. Peter's, in which his father had seats, and went to the more remote church of Fordington, where he had a pew all to himself on this frosty winter night, except for one well-behaved worshipper in the person of his father's old and confidential clerk, James Hayfield, a constant church-goer, who was punctual at every evening service, whatever the weather. Harrington had expected to see him there.

Hayfield sat modestly aloof at the further end of the pew, but when the service was over the young man took some pains to follow close upon the heels of the grey-haired clerk, with shoulders bent by long years of desk-work, and respectable dark-blue Chesterfield overcoat with velvet collar.

"How do you do, Hayfield? Isn't this rather a sharp night for you to venture out in?" said Harrington, as they left the church porch.

"I'm a toughish customer, I thank you, Mr. Harrington. It would take severer weather than this to keep me away from the evening service. I'm very fond of the evening service. A fine sermon, sir, a fine, awakening sermon."

"Magnificent, capital," exclaimed Harrington, who hadn't heard two consecutive sentences, and whose mind had been engaged upon arithmetical problems of the most unpleasant kind. "It is uncommonly cold though," he added, shivering. "I'll walk round your way. It will be a little longer for me."

"You're very good, Mr. Harrington, very good indeed," said the old clerk, evidently touched by this unusual condescension. Never till to-night had his master's son offered to walk home from church with him.

The old man's gratitude was more than Harrington could stand. He could not take credit for kindly condescension, when he knew himself intent upon his own selfish ends.

"I'm afraid I'm not altogether disinterested in seeking your company to-night, Hayfield," he blurted out. "The fact is, I want to ask a favour of you."

"You may take it as granted, Mr. Harrington," answered the clerk cheerily, "provided the granting of it lies within my power."

"Oh, it's not a tremendous affair—in point of fact it's only a small money matter. I'm exceeding my allowance a little this quarter, but I intend to pull up next quarter; and it will be a great convenience to me in the meantime if you'll lend me ten or fifteen pounds."

It was out at last. He had no idea until he uttered the words how mean a creature the utterance of them would make him seem to himself. There are people who go through life borrowing, and who do it with the easiest grace, seeming to confer rather than to ask a favour. But perhaps even with these gifted ones the first plunge was painful.

"Fifteen or twenty, if you like, sir," replied Hayfield. "I've got a few pounds in an old stocking, and any little sum like that is freely at your service. I know your father's son won't break his word or

forget that an old servant's savings are his only bulwark against age and decay."

"My dear Hayfield, of course I shall repay you next quarter, without fail."

"Thank you, Mr. Harrington, I feel sure you will. And if at the same time I may venture a word, as an old man to a young one, in all friendliness and respect, I would ask you to beware of horses. I heard some one let drop the other evening in the billiard-room at the 'Antelope,' where I occasionally play a fifty, I heard it said, promiscuously, that Sir Henry Baldwin is a better hand at selling a horse than you are at buying one."

"That's bosh, Hayfield, and people in a Godforsaken town like Dorchester will always talk bosh —especially in a public billiard-room. The horse is a good horse, and I shall come home upon him when I send him up to Tattersall's after the hunting."

"I only hope he won't come home upon you, sir. You'd better not put a high reserve upon him if you don't want to see him again. I used to be considered a pretty good judge of a horse in my time. I never was an equestrian, but one sees

more of a horse from the pavement than when one is on his back."

Harrington felt that he must bear with this twaddle for the sake of the twenty pounds which would enable him to lend Juliet a round fifty, and would thereby enable Juliet to go to Medlow Court and flirt with unknown men, and forget him upon whom her impecuniosity was inflicting such humiliation. After all love is only another name for suffering.

Mr. Hayfield lived in West-Walk terrace, where he had a neat first floor in a stucco villa, semi-detached, and built at a period when villas strove to be architectural without attaining beauty. The first floor consisted of a front sitting-room, looking out upon the alley of sycamores and the green beyond, and a back bedroom, looking over gardens and houses, towards the church-tower in the heart of the town.

Provided with a latch-key, Mr. Hayfield admitted his master's son to the inner mysteries of the villa, where a lady with a very reedy voice was singing "Far away," in the front parlour, while a family conversation which almost drowned her melody was going on in the back parlour. Mr. Hayfield's bed-

room candlestick and matches were ready for him on a Swiss bracket near his door, and his lamp was ready on a table in his sitting-room, where every object was disposed with a studied precision which marked at once the confirmed bachelor and the model lodger. "The Pilgrim's Progress," "The Christian Year," "Whittaker's Almanack," and "Uncle Tom's Cabin," were placed with mathematical regularity upon the walnut loo table, surrounding a centrepiece of wax flowers in an alabaster vase under a glass shade. A smaller table of the nature described as Pembroke was placed nearer the fire, and on this appeared Mr. Hayfield's supper tray, set forth with a plate of cold roast beef, a glass saucer of Oriental pickle, cheese, and accompaniments, flanked by an Imperial pint of Guinness'. A small fire burned brightly in the grate, whose dimensions had been reduced by a careful adjustment of fire bricks.

"Sit down, my dear Mr. Harrington, you'll find that chair very comfortable. I'll go and get you the money. My cash box is in the next room. Can I tempt you to join me in a plate of cold ribs? There's plenty more where that came from. Mrs.

Potter has a fine wing rib every Sunday, from year's end to year's end. I generally take my dinner with her and her family, but I sup alone. A little society goes a long way with a man of my age. I like my *Lloyd* and my *News of the World* after supper."

He went into his bedroom, which was approached by folding doors, and came back again in two minutes with a couple of crisp notes, the savings of half a year, savings which meant a good deal of self-denial in a man who in his own words wished to live like a gentleman. The old clerk prided himself upon his good broadcloth, clean linen, and respectable lodgings; and it was felt in the town that so respectable a servant enhanced even the respectability of Dalbrook & Son.

Harrington took the bank-notes with many thanks, and insisted upon writing a note of hand—albeit the old clerk reminded him that Sunday was a *dies non*—at the desk where Hayfield wrote his letters and did any copying work he cared to do after office hours. He stayed while the old man ate his temperate meal, but would not be persuaded to share it. Indeed, his lips felt hot and dry, and it seemed to him as if

he should never want to eat again; but he gladly accepted a tumbler of the refreshing Guinness' upon the repeated assurance that there was plenty more where that came from.

There was a rapid thaw on the following morning, so Harrington rode the black over to the Mount in the twilight after office hours, a liberty which that high-bred animal resented by taking fright at every doubtful object in the long leafless avenue beyond the Roman Amphitheatre.

Trifles which would have been light as air to him, jogging homeward in company after a long day's hunting, assumed awful and ghostly aspects under the combined influences of solitude and want of work. The twilight ride to the Mount was in fact a series of hairbreadth escapes, and it would have needed a stronger stimulant than the Dowager's wishy-washy tea to restore Mr. Dalbrook's physical balance, if his mental balance had not been so thoroughly unhinged as to make him half unconscious of physical discomfort.

"You look awfully seedy," said Juliet, as she poured out tea from a pot that had been standing nearly half an hour.

The Dowager had retired to her own den, where she occupied a great portion of her life in writing prosy letters to her relatives and connections of all degrees; but as she never sent them anything else, this was her only way of maintaining the glow of family feeling.

"The black nearly pulled my fingers off," replied Harrington. "I never knew him so fresh."

"You should have taken it out of him on the downs," answered Juliet, rather contemptuously. "The grass is all right after the thaw. Have you brought me what you so kindly promised?"

He took a sealed envelope out of his breast-pocket and handed it to her.

"Is this the fifty? How quite too good of you," she cried, pocketing it hastily. "You don't know what a difficulty you have got me out of; but I'm afraid I may have inconvenienced you."

This was evidently an after-thought.

"'Being your slave, what should I do but tend upon the hours and times of your desire,'" quoted Harrington, with a sentimental air.

"How sweet!" exclaimed Juliet, really touched by his affection; yet she would rather he had told

her that fifty pounds was a sum of no consequence, and that so small a loan involved no inconvenience for him.

"I'm afraid his father can hardly be as rich as people think," she said to herself, while Harrington relaxed his strained muscles before the fire.

"How I wish you were not going to Medlow," he said presently.

"So do I; but I can't possibly get out of it, and then it's a blessed escape to get away from here."

"Do you really dislike your home?" asked her lover, wondering at this hitherto unknown characteristic in a young woman.

"I loathe it, and so does my sister, though she pretends to be domestic and religious and all that kind of thing. Lady Baldwin is an impossible person, and our housekeeping would disgrace the Union. If I had not had the *entrée* of plenty of good houses, and been in request, I should have been found hanging in one of the attics years ago."

This candour gave Harrington an uncomfortably chilly feeling, as if a damp cold wind had blown over

him, and then he told himself that it would be his privilege to initiate this dear girl in the tranquil delights of a happy home, which, while modest in its pretensions, should yet be smart enough to satisfy her superior tastes and aspirations.

"When do you go?" he asked, preparing to take leave.

"To-morrow. Your kindness has made everything easy to me."

"Come back as soon as you can, love;" and then there was some lingering foolishness permissible between engaged lovers, and the beautiful Miss Baldwin's head reposed for two or three minutes upon the articled clerk's shoulder, while he looked into her eyes and told her that they were stars to light him on to fame and fortune.

"I hope they'll show you a short cut," she said.

He left her cheered by the thought that she was very fond of him; and so she was, but he was not the first, second, third, or fourth young man of whom she had been fond, nor was it a new thing to her to be told that her eyes were guiding stars.

## CHAPTER VII.

"All the creatures
Made for Heaven's honours, have their ends, and good ones,
All but the cozening crocodiles, false women."

FEBRUARY had begun, the frost and snow had disappeared. There were soft breathings of spring in the breezes that blew over the broad grassy downs beyond the Roman encampment, and the sportsmen of the neighbourhood were rejoicing in open weather and lengthening daylight; but Juliet Baldwin was still at Medlow Court, and the heart of Harrington Dalbrook was heavy as he set out in the pleasant morning for some distant meet; and it was heavier as he rode home in the evening, after a day's sport which had shown him only too distinctly that the black horse was not so young as he had been. He hugged himself with the delusion that those indications of advancing years which were but too obvious towards the close of a trying day across a heavy country, would vanish after a week's rest, and that

the horse would show no signs of staleness at Tattersall's, where he must inevitably be sold before the end of the month, his owner seeing no other way of meeting the bill that had been given in exchange for a beast whose name should have been not Mahmud, but White Elephant.

Harrington's sole motive for buying a hunter—or, rather, his sole excuse for being trapped into the purchase—was the expectation of being able to ride to hounds in Miss Baldwin's company. She had said to him "You ought to hunt," and he had straightway hunted, just as, if she had told him to balloon, he would have ballooned. And now Juliet Baldwin was following the hounds in another county while he was in Dorsetshire plodding along dreary roads to inaccessible meets at places which would seem to have been chosen with a special study of everybody's inconvenience. The whole business was fraught with bitterness. He had never loved hunting for its own sake—had never possessed the single-mindedness of the genuine sportsman, who cares not for weather or country, or companionship, or hunger or thirst, so long as there is a fox at the beginning of the day and blood at the end.

Juliet was out with the hounds three days a week. She wrote rapturous accounts of forty minutes here, and an hour there; and every run which she described was apparently the quickest thing that had ever been known in that country. She let her lover know *en passant* that she had been greatly admired, and that her horsemanship had been talked about. Her letters were very affectionate, but they testified also to a self-love that amounted to adoration. Her frocks, her horses—provided, as the young ravens are fed, by a kindly Providence in the shape of casual acquaintance—her breaks at billiards, her waltzing, were all dilated upon with a charming frankness.

"It seems rather foolish to write all this egotistical twaddle," she apologised, "but you complain if I send you a short letter, and there is literally nothing to tell here—at least nothing about any one you know, or that would have the faintest interest for you—so I am obliged to scribble about my frocks and my little social triumphs."

This was kindly meant, no doubt, but it stung him to be reminded that his friends were not her

friends, that Belgravia is not further from Islington than her people were from his people.

In one of her letters she wrote casually :—

"Why don't you put Mahmud into a horse-box and come over for a day with these hounds. It would be capital fun. There is a dear little rustic inn where you and your horse can put up—and Lady B. would ask you to dinner as a matter of course. I daresay your highly-respectable hair will stand on end at some of our ways—but that won't matter. I am sure you would enjoy an evening or two at Medlow. Think about it, like a dear boy."

Harrington did think about it—indeed, from the first reading of his lady-love's unceremonious invitation he thought of nothing else. After much puzzling over time-tables he found that trains—those particular trains which condescend, with an asterisk, to carry horses—could be matched so as to convey the black horse to the immediate vicinity of Medlow Court in something under a day, and this being so he telegraphed his intention of putting up at the "Medlow Arms" on the following night, taking pains to add "Shall arrive at five p.m.," so as to secure the promised invitation to dinner. He

had been so chary of spending money since his loan to Juliet that he had still a few pounds in hand, enough as he thought to pay travelling expenses and hotel bills. His heart was almost light as he packed his hunting-gear and dress suit, albeit March 10 was written in fiery characters across a spectral bill which haunted him wherever he went.

It was still early in February he told himself. Some stroke of luck might happen to him. Some rich young fool at Medlow Court might take a fancy to Mahmud and want to buy him. He had heard of men who wanted to buy horses, although it had been his fate to meet only the men who were eager to sell.

After no less than three changes of trains he arrived at the Toppleton Road Station—for Medlow and Toppleton—about half-past four, weary, but full of hope. He was to see her again—after three weeks' severance. He was going at her own express desire. It was her tact and cleverness that had made the visit easy for him. Had he not Lady Burdenshaw's invitation in his pocket, in a fine open-hearted hand, sprawling over three sides of large note-paper :—

"Dear Mr. Dalbrook,—I hear you are coming over for a day or two with our hounds, and I hope you will contrive to dine with us every evening while you are in the neighbourhood. Your father and Sir Phillimore were old friends. Dinner at eight.

"Sincerely yours,

"Sarah Burdenshaw."

Sir Phillimore had been in the family vault nearly fifteen years. The malicious averred that he had sought that dismal shelter as a refuge and a relief from the life which Lady Burdenshaw imposed upon him—open house, big shoots, hunting breakfasts, fancy balls, and private theatricals in the country; and in London perpetual parties or perpetual gadding about.

Sir Phillimore's grandfather had come up from Aberdeen, a raw boy without a penny, and had found out something about the manufacture of iron which had eventually made him a millionaire. Sir Phillimore's fortune had reconciled the beautiful Sally Tempest to a marriage with a man who was her senior by a quarter of a century, and the only

license she had allowed herself had been her indulgence in boundless extravagance, and a laxity of manner which had somewhat shocked society in the sober fifties and sixties, though it left her moral character unimpeached.

In the eighties nobody wondered or exclaimed at Lady Burdenshaw's freedom of speech and manner, or at the manners she encouraged in her guests. In the eighties Sarah Burdenshaw was generally described as "good fun."

Harrington found the dear little rustic inn very picturesque externally, but small and stuffy within, and the bedroom into which he was ushered was chiefly occupied by a large old-fashioned, four-post bedstead, with chintz hangings that smelt of mildewed lavender—indeed, the pervading odour of the "Medlow Arms" was mildew. He dressed as well as he could under considerable disadvantages; and a rumbling old landau, which had the local odour, conveyed him to Medlow Court much quicker than he could have supposed possible from his casual survey of the horse. It was ten minutes to eight when he entered Lady Burdenshaw's drawing-room.

It was a very large room, prettily furnished in a careless style, as if by a person whose heart was not set upon furniture. There were plenty of low luxurious chairs, covered with a rather gaudy chintz, and befrilled with lace and muslin, and there were flowers in abundance; but of human life the room was empty.

Harrington hardly knew whether he was relieved or discomposed at finding himself alone. He had leisure in which to pace the room two or three times, to arrange his tie and inspect his dress suit before one of the long glasses, and then to feel offended at Juliet's coldness. She knew that he was to be there. She might surely have contrived to be in the drawing-room ten minutes before the dinner hour.

Half a dozen people straggled in, a not too tidy-looking matron in ruby velvet, a sharp-featured girl in black lace, and some men who looked sporting or military. One of these talked to him.

"I think you must be Mr. Dalbrook," he said, after they had discussed the weather and the state of the roads.

"You are quite right—but how did you guess?"

"Miss Baldwin told me you were coming, and I

don't think there's any one else expected to-night. Do you know your hostess?"

"I am waiting for that privilege."

"Ah! that explains your punctuality. Nobody is ever punctual at Medlow. Eight o'clock means half-past, and sometimes a quarter to nine. Lady Burdenshaw has reached her sixtieth year without having arrived at a comprehension of the nature of time, as an inelastic thing which will not stretch to suit feminine convenience. She still believes in the elasticity of an hour, and rushes off to her room to dress when she ought to be sitting down to dinner. Her girl friends follow her example, and seldom leave the billiard-room or the tea-room till dear Lady B. leads the way."

A whole bevy of ladies entered the room rather noisily at this moment, and among them appeared Juliet, magnificent in a red gown, which set off the milky whiteness of her shoulders.

"Rather a daring combination with red hair," remarked the young lady in black, who was sitting on a narrow *causeuse* with a large man, whose white moustache and padded chest suggested a cavalry regiment.

"You may call the lady a harmony in red," said the gentleman.

Harrington scowled upon these prattlers, and then crossed the room to greet his love. Yes, it was a daring combination, the scarlet gown with the ruddy tints in her auburn hair: but the audacity was justified by success. She looked a magnificent creature, dazzling as Vashti in her Eastern splendour, invincible as Dalilah. Who could resist her?

She gave her hand to Harrington, and seemed pleased to see him, but in the next moment he saw her looking beyond him towards the end of the room. He turned, involuntarily following the direction of her eyes, and saw the man who had talked to him, and who was now evidently watching them. He was a middle-aged man, handsome, tall, and upstanding, and with an air which Harrington considered decidedly patrician.

"Who is that man by the piano?" he asked.

"Major Swanwick, Lord Beaulieu's younger brother."

"Ah, I thought he was a swell," said Harrington, innocently. "He was very civil to me just now. You might have been in the drawing-room a little

earlier, Juliet. You must have known that I was longing to see you."

"My dear boy, we were playing skittle-pool till five minutes to eight. I had no idea you were in the house. Ah, here comes Lady B."

A fat, fair, flaxen-haired lady in a sky-blue tea-gown embroidered with silver palm-leaves came rolling into the room, murmuring apologies for having kept people waiting for their dinner.

"I know you must all be delightfully ravenous," she said; "and that's ever so much better than feeling that dinner has come too soon after lunch."

Juliet introduced her friend, who was most graciously received.

"How is your father?" asked Lady Burdenshaw. "It is ages since I saw him—more than twenty years I believe. Sir Phillimore bought some land in your county, and Mr. Dalbrook acted for him in the matter, and he still receives the rents. And so you are going out with the hounds to-morrow? They meet quite near—not more than seven or eight miles from your inn. Juliet will show you the way across country. She's always in the first flight; but if you want to know her particular talent you

should see her play pool. I can assure you she makes all the men sit up."

Harrington scarcely followed the lady's meaning. There was no time for explanations, as the butler, who had been waiting for her Ladyship's appearance, now announced dinner, and Harrington had the bliss of going to the dining-room with Juliet Baldwin on his arm. He felt as if he were in the Moslem's enchanted fields as he sat by her side at the brilliant table, with its almost overpowering perfume of hothouse flowers, which were grouped in great masses of bloom among the old silver and the many-coloured Venetian glass. Yes, it was a Mohammedan paradise, and this was the houri, this lovely creature with the milky shoulders rising out of soft folds of scarlet crape.

"How long are you going to stay here, Juliet?" he asked, as the houri unfolded her napkin.

She gave a little laugh before she answered the question.

"Compare this room and table with our dining-room at the Mount—you can compare the dinner with my mother's dinners after you have eaten it—and ask yourself if any reasonable creature would

be in a hurry to leave this Canaan for that wilderness. I'm afraid I shall stop as long as ever dear old Lady B. asks me; and she is always pressing me to extend my visit."

"I don't think dinner can be much of attraction in your mind, Juliet," said Harrington.

"Of course not—girls don't care what they eat," replied Juliet, sipping her clear soup, and most fully appreciating the flavour. "But there are so many advantages at Medlow. There is the hunting, for instance, which is much better than any I can get at home, where I have positively no horse that I can call my own. Here I can always rely upon a good mount."

"Has Lady Burdenshaw a large stable?"

"Oh, she keeps a good many horses; but most of hers are only fit for leather. There are men who come here with strings of hunters, and have always a young one that they like me to handle for them."

"Juliet, you will get your neck broken," cried Harrington, pale with horror, and staring vacantly at the fish that was being offered to him.

"There is no fear of that while I ride young horses, the danger is an old one. My father taught

me to ride, and as he was one of the best cross-country riders in Dorset I am not likely to make a mistake. You had better try that *sole Normande*; it is one of the Medlow specialities."

"Juliet, I hate the idea of your staying in this house—or in any house where there is a crowd of fast men. I hate the idea of your riding men's horses—of your being under an obligation to a stranger——"

"Don't I tell you that the obligation is all the other way. A young hunter is a more saleable article when he has carried a lady. 'Will suit a bold horsewoman in a stiff country.' That sort of thing is worth a great deal in a catalogue, and the men whose horses I ride are not strangers."

"At the most they are casual acquaintances."

"Call them that if you like. Why should not one profit by one's acquaintances?"

"There is one of your benefactors looking at you at this moment, and looking as if he objected to my talking to you."

"How dare you talk about my benefactors? Do you suppose I had you invited to Medlow in order that you might insult me?"

This little dialogue was conducted in subdued tones, but with a good deal of acrimony upon either side. Harrington was bursting with jealousy.

The house, the men, the very atmosphere awakened distrust. He detested those men for their square shoulders and soldierly bearing, for the suggestion of cavalry or household brigade which seemed to him to pervade the masculine portion of the assembly. He had always hated military men. Their chief mission in life seemed to be to make civilians look insignificant.

Miss Baldwin ate the next *entrée* in stony silence, and it was not till he had abjectly apologised for his offensive speech that her lover was again taken into favour. She relented at last, however, and favoured him with a good deal of information about the house party which made such a brilliant show at Lady Burdenshaw's luxurious board.

The men were for the most part military—the greater number bachelors, or at any rate unencumbered with wives. Two had been divorced, one was a widower, another was separated in the friendliest way from a wife who found she could live in better style unfettered by matrimonial supervision.

Major Swanwick was one of the two who had profited by Sir James Hannen's jurisdiction.

"His wife was Lady Flora Thurles, one of the Tantallans. All the Tantallan girls went wrong, don't you know. It was in the blood."

"You and he seem to be great friends," said Harrington, still suspicious.

"Oh, we have met very often; he is quite an old chum of mine. He is a good old thing."

Seeing that the good old thing looked as if he were well under forty, Harrington was not altogether reassured, even by this comfortable tone. He watched his betrothed and the Major all through the long evening in the billiard-room, where pool was again the chief amusement of a very noisy party, of which Juliet and Major Swanwick seemed to him the ringleaders and master spirits. It was with difficulty that he, the affianced, got speech with his betrothed.

There were just a few minutes, while the old family tankards were being carried round with mulled claret and other cunning drinks, in which Juliet vouchsafed to give her attention to her lover, he having in a manner cornered her into a draped

recess at the end of the room, where he held her prisoner while he bade her good night.

"I shall see you at the meet to-morrow," he said.

"I won't promise to be at the meet, but I shall find you and the hounds in plenty of time. I know every inch of this country."

"Whose horse are you going to ride to-morrow?"

"A fine upstanding chestnut; I'm sure you'll admire him?"

"Yes, yes, but whose?"

"Whose?" echoed Juliet, as if she scarcely understood the word. "Oh," with a sudden flash of intelligence; "you mean whose property is he? As if that mattered! He belongs to Major Swanwick."

"Good night!" said Harrington, and he went off to take leave of Lady Burdenshaw, who was sitting in the capacious ingle nook, with a circle of men about her telling her anecdotes in Parisian French, and from whom every now and then there burst peals of jovial laughter.

"At my age one understands everything, and one may hear everything," said her Ladyship.

Harrington went back to the "Medlow Arms" more depressed than he had felt during any period of his courtship. Instinct had warned him of the dangers that must lurk in such a house as Medlow Court for such a girl as Juliet Baldwin; but neither instinct nor imagination had prepared him for the horrible reality. To see the woman who was to be his wife smoking cigarettes, playing shilling pool, and bandying doubtful jokes with men who had obviously the very poorest opinion of the opposite sex, was an agony which he had never thought to suffer; and for the first time since his engagement he asked himself whether it would not have been better to have trusted his future happiness to the most insipid and colourless of the girls with whom he played tennis than to this magnificent specimen of emancipated smartness. The image of Juliet sprawling over the billiard-table, with her eyes on fire and her shoulders half out of her gown as she took a difficult "life," pursued him like a bacchanalian nightmare all through his troubled snatches of sleep. The stony straw mattrass and lumpy feather bed would not have been conducive to slumber under the happiest circumstances, but for a mind disturbed by

care they were a bed of torture. He rose at seven, unrefreshed, heavy-hearted, detesting chanticleer, cloudy skies, and all the old-fashioned fuss about a hunting morning, and wishing himself in his comfortable room in the good old house in Cornhill, where he had ample space and all things needful to a luxurious toilet. He got himself dressed somehow. He was in the saddle at nine o'clock, after a breakfast for which he had no appetite.

It was a long, dreary ride to the little roadside inn at which the hounds met, and Harrington being particularly punctual, had to jog along companionless till the last mile, when Major Swanwick and another man from Medlow overtook him and regaled him with their talk for the rest of the way.

"I think I know that black horse," said the Major, who looked provokingly well in his red coat, chimney pot, and cream-coloured tops, thereby making Harrington ashamed of his neat dark gray coat, Bedford cords, and bowler hat. "Wasn't he in Baldwin's stud nine years ago?"

"I bought him of Sir Henry Baldwin."

"Thought so. Good hand at selling a horse,

Baldwin! However, I suppose there's some work in the black horse yet."

"I hope so, for I mean to hunt him to the end of the season," answered Harrington, ignoring that awful necessity of selling before the end of the month.

Hope glowed faintly in his breast as he saw the Major's keen eye going over his mount, as if studying the condition of every limb and every muscle.

"Wears well," he said, after this deliberate survey, "but I'm afraid you'll find him like the wonderful one-horse shay. He'll go to pieces all at once. Did Baldwin tell you his age?"

"He said something about rising eight—but I didn't inquire very particularly, as I know the horse is a good one."

"And it was a good one of Baldwin to talk about rising eight. He would have been within the mark if he had said rising eighteen. I've bought a horse of Sir Henry myself, and,"—after a brief pause—"I've sold him one."

"And I daresay that made you even," said Harrington, with acidity. He would have liked to call the Major out for his insolence, and almost re-

gretted that he was a Briton, and not a Frenchman and a professed duellist.

"Faith, I don't think he had altogether the best of me—for when he rode that hunter of mine he was like the little old woman in the nursery rhyme, of whom it was said that she should have music wherever she went. He had music, and to spare."

And so with jovial laughter they rode up to the open space in front of the "Red Cow," where the hounds were grouped about a duck pond, while the master chatted with his friends.

It was an hour later before Juliet appeared, cropping up suddenly on a windy common, with three other girls and two men, while the hounds were drawing the furze.

"You see I could make a pretty good guess where to find you," she said to Harrington. "How well the black looks! You have been saving him up, I suppose?"

"No, I've hunted as often as I could. I had no other distraction during your absence."

"How sweet of you to say that—with all the gaieties of Dorchester to allure you! Hark! they've found, and we shall be off in a minute. Yes, there

he goes!" pointing with her whip to the spot where the fox had flashed across the short level sward, vanishing next moment in the withered heather. "Now you'll see what this horse can do, and you can tell me what you think of him when we meet at dinner."

There was the usual minute or so of flutter and expectation, and then the business-like calm—an almost awful calm—every man settling down to his work, intent upon himself, steering carefully for a good place.

Harrington was a nervous rider, and if fortune helped him to get a good place he rarely kept it. To-day he was more than usually nervous, fancying that Juliet's eye was upon him, which it wasn't, and, indeed, could not have been, unless it had been situated in the back of her head, since she was already ever so far in front.

In time, however, he, too, contrived to settle down, and the black horse took the business into his own hands, and kept his rider fairly close to the hounds. For the first twenty minutes there was a good deal of jumping, but of a mildish order, and Harrington felt that he was distinguishing himself,

inasmuch as he was able to stick to his horse, though not always to his saddle.

They lost their first fox, after a very fair run, and they waited about for nearly two hours before they started a second, which they did eventually in a scrubby copse on the skirts of a great stretch of ploughed land.

The plough took a good deal out of Mahmud, and after the plough came a series of small fields, with some stiffish fences, which had to be taken by any man who wanted to keep with the hounds. Here Juliet was in her glory, for the chestnut on which she was mounted was a fine fencer, and she knew how to handle him, or, perhaps it may be said, how to let him alone.

Mahmud had been almost as fine a fencer as the fiery young chestnut, and he was a horse of a great heart, always ready to attempt more than he could do. The livery stable people had told Harrington that if his legs were only as good as his heart he would be one of the best hunters in the county. And now, with some quavering of spirit on his own part, Harrington trusted that heart would stand instead of legs, and get him and the black over the

fences somehow. Just at this crucial point in the run Juliet was in front of him, and Major Swanwick was pressing him behind. He was near the hounds, and altogether in a place of honour, could he but keep it, and to keep it he felt was worth a struggle.

He got over or through the first fence somehow; not gloriously, but without too much loss of time: and galloped gaily towards the second, which looked a stiffer and more complicated affair. Juliet's horse went over like a bird, and Juliet sat him like a butterfly, no more discomposed by the shock than if she had been some winged insect that had lighted on his haunches. Mahmud followed close, excited by the horse in front of him, and rose to his work gallantly; but this time it was timber and not quickset that had to be cleared, and that stiff rail was just too much for the old hunter's legs. He blundered, hit himself with the sharp edge of the rail, and fell heavily forward, sending his rider flying into the next field, and sinking in a struggling mass into the ditch. Major Swanwick dismounted in an instant, scrambled over the hedge, and ran to help Harrington up.

"Are you hurt?"

"Mot much," answered the fallen man, staggering to his feet, hatless, and with a dazed look. "I'm afraid my horse is done for, though, poor old chap."

In that moment his only thought was of the beast he had been fond of, which had been to him as a friend, albeit often an unmanageable one. He had no thought just then of the money value of that doubled-up mass lying in the ditch.

Mahmud had finished his course. His forearm was broken, and the most merciful thing was to make a swift end of him with a bullet from a gun which one of the whips fetched from the nearest farmhouse. His owner stood by him and waited for the end, while Juliet and the rest of the hunt galloped away out of sight. When the shot had been fired the black horse was left to be carted off to the kennels, and Harrington turned to walk slowly and sorrowfully to the farmhouse, where he was promised a trap to convey him to the "Medlow Arms."

Then and then only did he discover that he had dislocated his shoulder, and was suffering acute

agony, and then and then only did he remember the acceptance which he had given for the black horse.

Where now were the fifty pounds which he had reckoned upon getting for the animal at Tattersall's, trusting to Providence, or old Hayfield, to make up the balance of thirty. He saw himself now with that horrible acceptance falling due and no assets.

He got back to the rustic inn, with great suffering, and laid himself down upon the stony-hearted four-poster instead of dressing to go and dine at Medlow. The village surgeon came and attended to his shoulder, a painful business, though not unskilfully done; and then he was told he must keep himself as quiet as possible for a few days, and must not think of travelling till the inflammation was reduced. It was his right shoulder on which he had fallen, and he was utterly helpless. The handy young man of the "Medlow Arms" had to valet him and assist him to eat the tough mutton chop which was served to him in lieu of all the delicacies of Medlow Court.

A messenger came from that hospitable mansion at ten o'clock with a little note from Juliet.

"Why did you not turn up at dinner time? Major Swanwick said you were all right. I waited

till I saw you get up, safe and sound. So sorry for poor old Mahmud. Come to breakfast to-morrow and tell us all about it. We killed in a quarter of an hour.—Yours, JULIET."

Harrington sent his best regards to Miss Baldwin and his apologies to Lady Burdenshaw, and begged to inform them that he had dislocated his shoulder, and was unable to write.

He had a miserable night—sleepless and in pain—haunted by the ghost of Mahmud, whose miserable end afflicted him sorely, and troubled by the perplexities of his financial position. Should he tell his father the whole truth? Alas, it seemed only yesterday that he had told his father the whole truth about his college debts; and though truthfulness is a great virtue, a second burst of candour coming on the heels of the first might be too much for Mr. Dalbrook's patience.

Should he borrow the money from Juanita? No, too humiliating. He had always felt a restraining pride in all his intercourse with his grand relations at Cheriton Chase. They were of his own blood; but they were above him in social status, and he was sensitively alive to the difference in position.

Could he apply to his brother? Again the answer was in the negative. He doubted whether Theodore possessed eighty guineas in the world.

And so he went on revolving the same considerations through his fevered brain all through the long winter night. There were moments of exasperation and semi-delirium, when he thought he would go over to Medlow Court as soon as he was able to move, and appeal to the beneficence of Lady Burdenshaw for the temporary accommodation of a cheque for eighty guineas.

And thus the night wore on till the morning sounds of the inn brought the sense of stern reality across his feverish dreams; and then, amidst the crowing of cocks, and the bumping of pails, and tramping of horses in the stable yard, he contrived to fall asleep, after having failed in that endeavour all through the quiet of the night.

It was about half-past eleven, and the handy-man had helped him to make a decent toilet and to establish himself upon a sofa that was a little harder than the bed, when a pony-carriage drove up to the door, and the chamber-maid came in with an awe-stricken face to announce Lady Burdenshaw and

another lady, and would he please to see them, as they wanted to come upstairs.

The room was tidy, and he was dressed as well as a helpless man could be, so he said yes, they might come up, which was almost unnecessary, as they were already on the stairs, and were in the room a minute afterwards.

Juliet expressed herself deeply concerned at her lover's misfortune, though she did not attempt to conceal from him that she considered his riding in fault. Lady Burdenshaw was more sympathetic, and was horrified at the discomfort of his surroundings.

"You cannot possibly endure that cruel-looking sofa till your shoulder is well," she said, "and such a small room, too, poor fellow; and a horrid low ceiling; and the house smells damp. I wonder if we could venture to move him to the Court, Ju?"

Ju was of opinion that such a proceeding would be to the last degree dangerous.

"The only chance for his shoulder is to keep quiet," she said.

Unfortunately, the surgeon had said the same thing, and there could be no doubt about it.

"Perhaps you could send him a sofa?" suggested Juliet.

"Of course I could; and I can send him soups and jellies and things—but that isn't like having him at Medlow, where he could have a large airy room, and where you and I could take it in turns to amuse him."

"Dear Lady Burdenshaw, you are too good to an almost stranger," murmured Harrington, moved to the verge of tears by her geniality.

"Stranger! fiddlesticks. Don't I know your cousin, Lord Cheriton; and has not your father done business for me? Besides, I like young men, when they're modest and pleasant, as you are. Indeed I sometimes like them when they're impertinent. I like young faces and young voices about me. I like to be amused, and to see people happy. I can't endure the idea of your lying for ever so many days and nights in this dog-kennel, when you came to Medlow to enjoy yourself."

"It mustn't be many days and nights. I must get home somehow by the end of the week, if I post all the way."

"Oh, you needn't post. When you are able to

be moved, my carriage shall take you to the station; and I'll get the railroad people to take an invalid carriage through to Dorchester for you."

"Indeed, you must not be impatient, Harry," said Juliet. "I shall come to see you every day, except on the hunting days, and even then I can walk over in the evening if Lady B. will let me."

"Of course I shall let you. All my sympathies are with lovers, and when you are married I shall give Mr. Dalbrook as much of my business as I possibly can venture to take away from those dear old fossils at Salisbury, who have been the family lawyers for the best part of a century."

Juliet had confided her engagement to Lady B. at the beginning of her visit, and she and Lady B. had talked over the young man's chances of doing well in the world, and the wisdom or the foolishness of such an alliance. Lady B. had seen a good deal of smart young men and women, and she had discovered that the smart young men were very keen in the furtherance of their own interests, and that the smart young women had considerable difficulty in getting themselves permanently established in the smart world by smart marriages. Some were beauti-

ful, and many were admired; but they had to wait for eligible suitors, and one false step in the early stages of their career would sometimes blight their chances of success. Juliet had taken many false steps, and had got herself a good deal talked about, and Lady Burdenshaw felt that her chance of making an advantageous match had been lessening year by year until it had come to be almost nil.

"If this young fellow is sensible and good-looking, and has a little money, I really think, Ju, you ought to marry him," concluded Lady B., talking the matter over with her *protégée* before she had seen Harrington.

She fancied that Juliet had cooled somewhat in her feelings towards her youthful lover within the last week or ten days. It might be, Lady B. thought, that she began to perceive that he was too young, that the difference in their ages, which was not much, and the difference in their worldly experience, which was enormous, unfitted them to be happy together.

"No doubt the young man is a *pis aller*," reflected Lady Burdenshaw, after Harrington's appearance at Medlow, "but he is a very good-looking

fellow, and by no means bad—as a *pis aller*. Of course, he is too young for Juliet, and much too fresh and innocent to understand her; but if he knew more he wouldn't be so eager to marry her—so she ought to be satisfied."

Lady Burdenshaw sent a delightful sofa, and a lot of books, flowers, pillows, foot-rests, and other luxuries in one of her own waggons, within an hour of her return to Medlow, and Harrington's comfort was considerably increased by her kindness. Still the thought of that wretched acceptance was like a thorn in every cushion, a scorpion under every pillow, a wasp in every flower. Nor was he altogether at ease about Juliet. He thought that he had detected a constraint in her manner, a shiftiness in her eyes. It had wounded him that she had so promptly opposed his being conveyed to Medlow. It might be that she was influenced only by concern for his safety; yet it would have been natural for his betrothed to wish to have him under the same roof with her, where she might tend and comfort him in his helplessness. Pain and anguish were wringing his brow, and she who should have been

his ministering angel was content to limit her ministration to half-an-hour of somewhat disjointed conversation, and to the polite attention of bringing him the morning papers, when everybody at Medlow had looked at them.

Lady Burdenshaw had very kindly taken upon herself to write to Matthew Dalbrook, explaining his son's prolonged absence, and making light of his accident as a matter only involving a few days' rest.

The few days had gone on till the fourth day after his fall, and in spite of all that Lady Burdenshaw had done to ameliorate his captivity the hours of the day and the night seemed to grow longer and longer, till he began to think of Silvio Pellico and the man in the iron mask. Juliet's visits were very short, and she was obviously absent-minded and bored even during that scanty half-hour which she gave to her betrothed.

"I'm afraid you are like Colonel Enderby's wife," he said, "and that the sight of sickness or suffering is more than you can bear."

"Who was Colonel Enderby's wife?"

"Don't you know? She is the heroine of a very

clever novel—an original, strange—and I fear not unnatural character."

"Don't remember her," answered Juliet, carelessly. "I don't read many English novels. They are too slow for me."

On the hunting day he missed even that brief visit, and was expectant of her coming all the evening, as she had promised to make up for the day's absence. But the night was wet, and she told him next day that she did not like to take out Lady Burdenshaw's horse and man in such weather.

"The stable people would have resented it, and I am obliged to stand well with the stable," she said.

He thought she had a troubled look that day. It seemed to him that it cost her an effort to keep her attention upon any subject, and she lapsed into silence every now and then, looking dreamily out of the window to the thatched roofs and ploughed fields in the distance.

"I'm afraid you have something on your mind," he said.

"What nonsense! What put such an idea into your head?"

"You are so thoughtful, and so much more silent than usual."

"There is so little to talk about in a sick room. If I were to tell you about our doings at Medlow I should only bore you."

"Not at all. I should be very pleased to hear how you amuse yourself. Is Major Swanwick still there?"

"Yes; he is still there."

He saw that her cheeks crimsoned as she answered his question, and he wondered whether she really had any *penchant* for the Major, or whether she suspected his jealous apprehensions upon that subject. She got up to go before he could question her further.

"I shall be late for luncheon," she said, "and Lady B. hates any of us to be absent!"

"I thought there was no such thing as punctuality at Medlow."

"Oh, we are pretty punctual at luncheon. It's the hungry hour, and we are all ravenous. Goodbye."

"*Au revoir*. You will come to-morrow, love; and come earlier, I hope."

"*It's possible*. I shall be out with the hounds."

"Another blank day for me. But don't disappoint me in the evening, whatever the weather may be."

She was gone, leaving him doubtful of her fidelity, though far from suspecting the extent of her falsehood.

He endured the long, dull day as best he might, and improved his mind by skimming all the books which Lady Burdenshaw had sent him, which were really the cream of Mudie's last supply—travels, memoirs, gossip, magazines—books chosen with a view to the masculine mind, which was supposed to be indifferent to fiction. Evening came at last. His lamp was lighted, his fire swept and garnished. The hunting party would be jogging homeward in the wintry darkness, he thought. There were three hours to wait before half-past nine, which was the earliest time at which he could expect his beloved.

It was a little after the half hour, when his heart began to beat faster at the sound of carriage wheels. This time she was not going to disappoint him. He listened for her step upon the stair—the firm, quick

tread he knew so well; but it was another step which he heard, a slower and heavier tread, with much rustling of silken draperies. It must be Lady Burdenshaw come to chaperon her.

It was Lady Burdenshaw, but alone. She came in and drew near his sofa with a serious countenance.

"Great God!" he cried, starting up from his reclining position; "is anything the matter? An accident in the hunting field! Is she hurt?"

"No, my poor fellow. *She's* not hurt. It would take a great deal to hurt her. She's too hard. But she has done her best to hurt you."

"What do you mean?"

"She has gone off with that audacious scamp."

"Major Swanwick?"

"Yes. Did you suspect anything?"

"I thought there was an understanding between them."

"They went off together early this morning; walked five miles to the station, leaving their luggage to be looked after by the Major's servant, who had received his instructions and who got everything packed and off by the one o'clock train for London.

I got this telegram late in the afternoon from Salisbury."

She handed him a telegram, which he read slowly, word by word, and then he slowly folded it and restored it to his visitor, in heart-stricken silence.

The telegram was in these words:—

"To Lady Burdenshaw, Medlow Court,—Major Swanwick and I were married at two o'clock, before the Registrar. We start for Monte Carlo to-night. Please break it to Harrington, and forgive me for going away without telling you. We thought it better to avoid fuss.—Yours lovingly,

"Juliet Swanwick."

"God help this infatuated girl," said Lady Burdenshaw. "She has married a scoundrel who is up to his eyebrows in debt. He behaved brutally to his first wife, and he is not very likely to treat this one any better. I'm very sorry I ever had them in my house together. He was an old flame, and he had lost her more than one good match by his equivocal attentions. As for you,

my dear young fellow, I congratulate you upon a very lucky escape."

Harrington put his hand before his eyes to hide the tears of mortification and wounded love. Yet, even while the sense of disappointment was keenest, he had a feeling that Lady Burdenshaw was right, and that he had escaped a lifelong martyrdom. How could he, with his limited means, have ever satisfied a woman who lived only for pleasure and excitement, dress and dissipation? Juliet had been very frank with him during their brief courtship, and he had seen enough of her character to know that this splendid creature was not of the stuff that makes a good wife for a professional man with his struggles all before him. He was sorry, he was angry, he was wounded to the quick; but in the midst of it all he felt that there was a burden lifted off his mind and off his life—that he could breathe more freely, that he was no longer overweighted in the race.

Lady Burdenshaw stopped with him for an hour, and told him a good many small facts to his charmer's discredit, although he begged her more than once to desist. It was her only idea of com-

forting him, and it may be that her efforts were not misdirected.

He was surprised on the following afternoon by a visit from his father, who was not satisfied with Lady Burdenshaw's report of his condition. Touched by this evidence of paternal affection the young man took heart of grace and made a full confession—first of his engagement, and next of his pecuniary obligations—the acceptance so soon to fall due, the twenty pounds borrowed from Hayfield.

"I can pay that very easily out of my allowance," he said, "I only tell you about it to show what a mean hound I was becoming."

"You were very hard driven, my poor boy. You had been unlucky enough to fall in love with an unprincipled woman. You may thank Providence for having escaped a life of misery. Such an alliance as that would have wrecked your future. I would rather you married a housemaid with a good character than such a woman as Juliet Baldwin. However, there are plenty of nice girls in your own sphere, thank God, and plenty of pretty girls with unblemished character and antecedents."

Harrington went back to Dorchester with his

father next day, and the acceptance was promptly honoured when it was presented at the house in Cornhill.

Sir Henry had discounted it at the local bank almost immediately after it passed into his possession, and the bank had regarded the document as good value for their money, Matthew Dalbrook being very unlikely to allow his son's signature to be dishonoured.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"All the spring-time of his love
Is already gone and past."

THEODORE went back to wintry London before the year was a week old. He settled himself by his lonely fireside, in the silence of his old-fashioned rooms. All he had of the beauty of this world was a glimpse of the river athwart the heavy grey mists of a London morning, or the lamps on the embankment shining like a string of jewels in the evening dusk. There were days of sullen, hopeless fog, when even these things were hidden from him, and when it was hard work to keep that stealthy, penetrating greyness and damp cold out of his rooms.

He had brought a fox-terrier from Dorchester on his return from his holiday, an old favourite that had seen the best days of her youth, and was better able to put up with a sedentary life, varied only by

an occasional run, than a younger animal would have been. This faithful friend, an animated little beast even at this mature stage of her existence, lightened the burden of his loneliness, were it only by leaping on to his knees twenty times in five minutes, and only desisting therefrom upon most serious remonstrance. It was pleasant to him to have something that loved him, even this irrepressible Miss Nipper, with her sidelong grin of affectionate greeting, and her unconquerable suspicion of rats behind the wainscot. He felt less like Dr. Faustus on that famous Easter morning, when the emptiness of life and learning came home to the lonely student with such desolating intensity, when even a devil was welcome who could offer escape from that dull burden of existence.

He had come back from his brief holiday dejected and disheartened. It seemed to him that she who was his lode-star was more remote from him than she had ever been—more and more remote—vanishing into a distant world where it was vain for him to follow. He had failed in the task that she had imposed upon him. He was no nearer the solution of that dark mystery which troubled her life than he

had been when he first promised to help her. How poor and impotent a creature he must appear in her eyes. His only discoveries had been negative. All that his keen, trained intellect, sharpened by seven years of legal experience, had been able to do was to prove the unsoundness of her own theory. He had started no theory upon his part. No flash of genius had illumined the obscurity which surrounded Godfrey Carmichael's death.

He went on with his plodding work, resolutely bent upon doing the utmost that patient labour can do to ensure success. Even if it were all vain and futile—that hope of winning favour in her eyes—the mere possibility of standing better with her, of showing her that he was of the stuff which goes to the making of distinguished men—even this was worth working for.

"She may have great offers by-and-by," he told himself, recalling what Lord Cheriton had said about his daughter's chances. "With her beauty and her expectations, to say nothing of her present means, she is sure of distinguished admirers; but at the worst she cannot look down upon a man who is on the road to success in her father's profession."

This ever-present consideration, joined to his love of his calling, sweetened all that was dry and dull in the initial stages of a barrister's career. While other men of his age were spending their evenings at the Gaiety Theatre, seeing the same burlesque and laughing at the same jokes night after night, as appetite grew with what it fed on, Theodore was content to sit in chambers and read law. It was not that he was wanting in appreciation of the drama. There was no man in London better able to enjoy the dignity of Hamlet at the Lyceum, or the rollicking fun of the Gaiety Bluebeard. He was no pedantic piece of clay, proud of the dulness that calls itself virtue. He was only an earnest worker, bent upon a given result, and able to put aside every hindrance upon the road that he was travelling.

"They that run in a race run all, but one obtaineth the prize," he said to himself, recalling a sentence in an epistle that he had learned years ago at his mother's knee, words that always brought back the cold brightness of early spring, and a period of extra church services, long sermons in the lamp-lit church, and the voices of strange preachers,

a time of daffodils and fish dinners, and much talk of High and Low Church. He had never faltered in his religious convictions; yet in the days of his youth that Lenten season in a country town, that recurrent sound of church bells in the chilly March twilight, had weighed heavy upon his soul.

Almost the only recreation which he allowed himself in this winter season was an occasional attendance at Miss Newton's tea-parties. He had secured acceptance for himself at these entertainments on the strength of his reading, and he was now established as a Shakspearian reader; Miss Newton having taken it into her head that Shakspeare is of all great poets the easiest understood by the people, and having ordered him to read Shakspeare until she should tell him to desist.

"I know what they like and what they dislike," she said. "They'll not conceal their feelings from me when we talk you over after you've gone. As soon as ever I find them getting tired I'll let you know."

He began with Macbeth, a story which caught them at the very first page. The witches took their breath away; and when he came to the murder

scene they were all sitting round him with their hair seemingly on end. He closed his first reading with that awful knocking at the gate; that one supreme stage effect which has never yet been paralleled by mortal dramatist. There were some of the girls who tumbled off their chairs and grovelled on the floor in their excitement. There were others who wanted to know the fate of Macbeth and his wife on the instant.

"I do hope they were both hung, like the Mannings," said a meek widow.

"Oh, but *he* wasn't so much to blame, Mrs. Kirby. That wicked woman drove him to it."

"So did Mrs. Manning," argued a Bermondsey lady, "but they hung Manning all the same when they caught him. I was a child when it happened, but I remember hearing about them. He was took in Jersey, and she wore a black satin gownd."

"Oh, don't talk about your Mannings, Mrs. Hodge," cried one of the girls indignantly. "They were low, vulgar people. These were a King and Queen in a palace. It's all different. It lifts one up out of one's own life only to hear about them. You may read about murders in the newspapers till

your eyes begin to swim, but you won't feel like *that*. I don't know when I've felt so sorry for anybody as I feel for King Macbeth."

Marian sat silent, and refrained from all part in the chorus of criticism, but she moved to the piano presently and began to play a Scotch air—a grand old march—slow, solemn music that was almost too much for the nerves of the more excitable among Miss Newton's party. She glided from one melody to another, and she played those wild Scottish airs with such thrilling power that they seemed to sustain and intensify the uncanny effect of the tragic reading.

Theodore went over to the piano and stood beside her as she played.

"I knew you were a musician," he said, "though I never heard you touch the keys till to-night."

"How did you know?"

"My cousin Juanita told me. She remembered your playing in her mother's room when she was a child."

The woman called Marian lifted her eyes to him with a look of patient reproach, as if she said, "You are cruel to hit any one so helpless as I

am," and then, playing all the time, she answered coldly,—

"I do not know what you are talking about."

"Don't you! Oh, but indeed I think you do, and I should be very glad to be of use to you if you would let me, for the sake of those old days. I don't think it is possible I can be mistaken, though you may have your own reason for refusing to confide in me."

He was certain now in his own mind that this was Mercy Porter and no other. That fine touch upon the piano implied sustained and careful cultivation. She did not play like a girl who had learnt music as an afterthought.

He left the house when she did, and walked part of the way to Hercules Buildings with her, but did not offer to go out of his way to see her home, being very sure she would refuse.

"I wish you would trust me," he said gently, as they walked side by side, without looking at each other. "Believe me that every one at Cheriton is sorry for you. If you were to go back to the neighbourhood you would have everybody's sympathy. There would be no one to cast a stone."

"I am very sorry I ever mentioned Cheriton to you, Mr. Dalbrook," she said impatiently. "It was a foolish impulse that made me talk. You insist upon making guesses. You try to force a confession from me. It is hardly generous."

"My interest in you must be my excuse."

"You can do me no good by that kind of interest. I shall never see Dorsetshire again—so what can it matter who I was when I lived in that part of the world. There are hundreds of women in London as lonely as I am—hundreds—perhaps thousands—who have broken every link with their past. My life suits me well enough, and I am contented. I shall never try to change it."

"That is a pity. You are young enough to make a good wife to an honest man, to help in creating a happy home."

"Am I? I feel a century old; and I have done with every thought of love or marriage. When I woke to consciousness after that dreadful fever, awoke from darkness and oblivion like that of the grave, I entered upon a new life. I came out of that sickness like one who had passed through hell. Passion and hope and youth, and good looks, had

been burnt out of me in a fiery furnace. It was a wonder to myself that my body was alive. It was no wonder to me that my heart was dead. From that time I have lived very much as I am living now—after a brief time of struggle and starvation—and the life suits me fairly well. I shall never seek to better it."

"That is hard, Marian."

He called her by her Christian name, frankly, in almost paternal friendliness, not knowing any other name by which to call her.

He was with Miss Newton earlier than usual on the occasion of her next tea-drinking, so early as to be before anybody else, and he talked to his hostess about Marian—Marian Gray, Miss Newton called her—confiding to her his conviction that this young woman was no other than Mrs. Porter's missing daughter. He told her of his interview with Mrs. Porter, and of the mother's angry repudiation of her child.

"I can but think that her hardness was assumed," he said, "and that the ice would melt at a touch if the mother and daughter could be brought together. I should like to try the experiment."

"It is hardly wise to try experiments with human hearts," said Miss Newton. "Marian is contented and at peace, if not happy. To force her back upon a mother who might be hard and bitter to her — do you think that would be true kindness?"

"What if the mother's heart has been yearning for her lost lamb in all these years, and by bringing her back I might make two lives happy."

"Let the mother come to the child. Let her who has something to forgive be the one to make the advance. It is so hard for the sinner to go back. She must be helped back. If the mother were a woman with a motherly heart she would have been searching for her lost child in all those years instead of wrapping herself up in her sorrow at home."

"I own I have thought that."

"Of course you have. You can't think otherwise as a sensible man. I have no patience with such a mother. As for Marian, I think she may get on very well as she is. I am fond of her, and I believe she is fond of me. She earns from twelve to fourteen shillings a week. She pays five shillings for her room, and she lives upon eightpence a day.

I needn't tell you that the teapot is her *pièce de resistance*. Her most substantial meal on some days consists of a couple of scones from the Scotch baker's, or a penny loaf and a hard boiled egg; but when I go to see her she gives me an admirable cup of tea, and positively delicious bread and butter. Her room is the very pink and pattern of neatness. All the instincts of a lady show themselves in that poor little two-pair back. She has curtained the iron bedstead and the window with white dimity, which is always clean and fresh, for she washes and irons it with her own hands. She generally contrives to have a bunch of flowers upon her work-table, and hard as she works, her room is always free from litter. She has about half-a-dozen books of her own upon the mantelshelf, her Bible, Milton, Shakspeare, Charles Lamb's Essays, Goldsmith's Poems, and the "Idyls of the King"—well-worn volumes, which have been her companions for years. She borrows other books from the Free Library, and her mind is always being cultivated. I really believe she is happy. She is one of those rare individuals who can afford to live alone. Do not disturb her lightly."

"You are right perhaps. The mother struck me as by no means a pleasant character, always supposing that Mrs. Porter is her mother, of which I myself have very little doubt."

Theodore made no further effort to bring mother and daughter together, but he met Marian from time to time at Miss Newton's tea parties, and acquaintance ripened into friendship. Her refinement and her musical talent sustained his interest in her. He talked to her of books sometimes when they happened to be sitting side by side at the tea-table, and he was surprised at the extent of her reading. She confessed when he questioned her that she was in the habit of stealing two or three hours from the night for her books.

"I find that I can do with a few hours' sleep," she said, "if I lie down happy in my mind after being absorbed in a delightful book. My books are my life. They give me the whole universe for my world, though I have to live in one room, and to follow a very monotonous calling."

He admired the refinement of that purely intellectual nature, but he admired still more that admirable tact which regulated her intercourse with Miss New-

ton's homelier friends. Never by word or tone or half-involuntary glance did Marian betray any consciousness of superiority to the uncultivated herd. She shared their interests, she sympathized with their vexations, she neither smiled nor shuddered at Cockney twang or missing aspirate.

Winter brightened into spring, with all its varieties of good and evil; east winds rushing round street corners, and cutting into the pedestrian like a knife; west winds enfolding him like a balmy caress, and bringing the perfume of violets, the vivid yellow of daffodils into the wilderness of brick and stone; rainy days, grey, monotonous, dismal, hanging on the soul like a curtain of gloom and hopelessness. These made up the sum of Theodore's outer life. Within he had his books, his ambition, and his faithful love. He told himself that it was a hopeless love; but there are many things which a man tells himself, and tries to believe, and yet does not believe. The very human longing for blessedness is too strong for human wisdom. Where there is love, there is always hope.

He had grown accustomed to his life in chambers; and albeit he was much attached to his father, and

was amiably tolerant of his brother and sisters, he could but feel that this solitary existence better suited his temper than residence in a family circle. At Dorchester it had been very difficult for him to be alone. Out of business hours his sisters considered that they had a claim upon him, a right to waste his life in the most trivial amusements and engagements. If he withdrew himself from their society, and that of their numerous dearest friends, they accused him of grumpiness, and thought themselves ill-treated. He had chafed against the waste of life, the utter futility of those engagements which prevented his keeping level with the intellectual growth of the age. He felt that his youth was slipping from under him, leaving him stationary, when every pulse of his being beat impatiently for progress. And now it was pleasant to him to be his own master, free to make the best possible use of his days. He found a few friends in London whose society suited him, and only a few. Among these the man of whom he saw most was Cuthbert Ramsay, a young Scotchman, who had been his chief companion at Cambridge, who had studied medicine for three years in Leipsic and Paris with

Ludwig and Pasteur, and who was now at St. Thomas'. The two young men ran up against each other in that main artery of London life, the Strand, in the January twilight, and renewed the friendly intimacy of that bygone time when Ramsay had been at Trinity and Dalbrook at Trinity Hall. They dined together at a restaurant on the evening of that first meeting, and after dinner Theodore took his friend to his chambers, where the two sat late into the night talking over college reminiscences of hall and river.

Cuthbert Ramsay had been one of the most remarkable undergraduates of those days, notable alike for mental and physical gifts which lifted him out of the ruck. He was six feet two—with the form of an athlete and as handsome a face as was ever seen within the gates of Trinity—and these advantages of person, which would have been noteworthy in any man, were the more remarkable in him, because of his utter indifference to them, or, perhaps, it may be said, complete unconsciousness of them. He knew that he was a big man, because his tailor told him as much; but he had never taken into consideration the question as to whether

he was or was not a handsome man; indeed, except when he had his hair cut, an operation which he always submitted to unwillingly and of dire necessity, it is doubtful if he ever looked into a glass long enough to know what manner of man he was; certainly not at his morning toilet, when he moved restlessly about the room hairbrushes in hand, belabouring his handsome head, and exercising his extraordinary memory by the repetition of some scientific formula acquired during the previous night's reading.

His own estimate of his appearance was comprised in the idea that he was "very Scotch." That milky whiteness of complexion, touched with just enough ruddy colour to give life to the face, those brilliant blue eyes, the straight nose, clear-cut nostrils, firm lips and firmer chin, the high broad brow, and crisp auburn hair, constituted to his mind nothing more than his brevet of nationality.

"No one would ever take me for anything but a Scotchman," he would say lightly, if any acquaintance ventured to hint at his good looks. "There's no mistake about me. Albion is written on my brow."

From his childhood upwards he had cared only for large things—intent upon investigation and discovery from the time he could crawl—asking the most searching questions of mother and of nurse—prying into those abstract mysteries which perplex philosophers before he could speak plain. The thirst for knowledge had grown with his growth and strengthened with his strength. His hardy boyhood had been spent for the most part in the windy streets of Aberdeen, marching with swinging stride along that granite pavement, his shabby red gown flapping in the north-easter; faring anyhow, as indifferent to what he ate as he was to what he wore, ahead of his fellows in all things intellectual, and abreast with the best athletes of his year in the sports they valued, a king among men, and of such a happy disposition that nothing in life came amiss to him, and what would have been hardship to another seemed sport to him.

Some one, a wealthy member of his extensive family, found out that this Cuthbert was no common youth, and that with a little encouragement he might do honour to the clan. This distant kinsman, one of the heads of the great house of

Ramsay, sent him to Cambridge, where he entered as a scholar of his college, and at the end of a year gained a University scholarship, which made him independent. This hardy youth from the city of Bon Accord was able to live upon so little—could not for the life of him have been extravagant, having none of that *mollesse*, or soft self-indulgence, which is at the root of most men's squanderings. He was nine-and-twenty years of age, and he had never worn a gardenia, and had only had one suit of dress clothes since he grew to man's estate. Needless to say that albeit he went out very seldom that suit was now somewhat shabby; but Cuthbert's superb appearance neutralized the shabbiness, and he looked the finest man in any assembly. His parents were in their graves before he left the University. He had no ties. He was free as Adam would have been if Eve had never been created. There was no one near or dear to him to feel proud of his honours, though his name was high in the list of Wranglers, and he had taken a first class in science. And now, after that interval of serious scientific work in Leipsic and Paris, he was plodding at St. Thomas' with a view to a London degree, and thus the two

hard-working young men—very intimate in the old days when Cuthbert's rooms in the Bishop's Hostel were conveniently adjacent to Theodore's ground floor in Trinity Hall—were thrown together again upon their life-journey, and were honestly glad to renew the old friendship.

Ramsay was delighted with his friend's chambers.

"I was afraid there was nothing so good as this left in the Temple," he said, rapturously contemplating the blackened old wainscot and the low ceiling with its heavy cross-beam. "I thought smartness and brand-new stone had superseded all that was historical and interesting within the precincts of the Lamb. But these rooms of yours have the true smack. Why, I really believe now, Dalbrook, you must have rats behind that wainscot?"

"Perhaps I had, till Miss Nipper came to keep me company," answered Theodore, patting the terrier, whose neat little head and intelligent ears were lifted at the sound of her name.

"And Nipper has made them emigrate to the next house, no doubt?"

"I'm glad you like my rooms, Cuthbert."

"Like them! I envy you the ownership more

than I can say. If anything can make me sorry that I am not a lawyer it would be the fact that I can't live in the Temple. We doctors have no distinctive abode, nothing associated with the past."

"Perhaps that is because medicine is essentially a progressive science."

"Is it? Sometimes I begin to doubt if it has made any progress since Galen—or Albertus Magnus. I will admit that there was progress of some kind up to *his* time."

"This house has an interest for me that it would have for no one else," said Theodore, presently, while his friend filled his briar-wood. "My kinsman, Lord Cheriton, occupied the rooms underneath these for about a dozen years; and it is a fancy of mine to keep his image before me as I sit here alone with my books. It reminds me of what a man can do in the profession which so many of my friends declare to be hopeless."

"No one knows anything about it, Theodore. If you went into statistics you would find that the chances of success in the learned professions are pretty nearly equal. So many men will get on, and so many will fail, at every trade, in every calling,

The faculty of success lies in the man himself. I always thought you were the kind of man to do well in whatever line you hit upon. A calm, clear brain and a resolute will are the first factors in the sum of life. And so Lord Cheriton lived in this house, did he? I have heard people talk of him as a very distinguished man, as well as a very lucky one. By the bye, it was in his house that strange murder occurred last year."

"Yes, it was in his house, and it was his daughter's husband who was murdered."

"Tell me the story, Theodore," said Ramsay, leaning back his handsome head, and half closing his eyes, with the air of a man who liked hearing about murders. "I read the account in the papers at the time, but I've very nearly forgotten all about it."

Theodore complied, and gave his friend the history of the case, and the failure of every attempt to find the murderer.

"And there has been nothing discovered since last summer?"

"Nothing!"

"That is rather hard upon Lord Cheriton—bear-

ing in mind your detective's suggestion of a vendetta. The vendetta would not be likely to close with the death of Sir Godfrey Carmichael. Hatred would demand further victims—Lord Cheriton himself perhaps—or this lovely young widow—but there could hardly be such a vindictive feeling without a strong cause. Enmity so deadly must have had a beginning in a profound sense of wrong."

"I have studied the case from that point of view, but can discover no cause for such malignity. I have almost given up all hope of unravelling the mystery."

"And your kinsman is to live under the sword of Damocles for the rest of his life? Upon my soul I pity him. I can imagine nothing in Ireland worse than the murder of Sir Godfrey Carmichael—a man seated peacefully in his own drawing-room; and a high-principled, amiable young man, you tell me, who never was known to wrong his fellow man."

Theodore Dalbrook did not spend his Easter holidays in Dorsetshire. He had heard from his sisters that Juanita was staying at Swanage with Lady Jane Carmichael. He was unwilling to in-

trude upon her there, and he had nothing to communicate upon the subject which was at present his only claim upon her interest. Under these circumstances he was easily persuaded to spend his vacation in a ten days' trip to Holland with Cuthbert Ramsay, who was keenly interested in the result of some experiments which had lately been made at Leyden; and thus it happened that Theodore let some time go by without seeing any member of his family except his father, who came to London occasionally upon business, and whom his son was delighted to entertain and make much of in his chambers or at his club, the serviceable Constitutional.

Towards the end of April he read an announcement in the papers which had touched him almost to tears.

"On the 23rd inst., at Milbrook Priory, the widow of Sir Godfrey Carmichael, of a posthumous son."

He was thankful for her sake that this new interest had been given to her days—that a new and fair horizon was open to her in this young life, with all its possibilities of love and gladness. It might be that the coming of this child would change the

current of her thoughts, that the stern desire for retribution would grow less keen, that the agonizing sense of loss would be softened almost to forgetfulness. He remembered those lovely lines of the poet philosopher's

> A child, more than all other gifts,
> Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts."

This child came, he hoped, freighted with healing and comfort, came like the glad spring-time itself, like Adonis or Persephone, with his arms full of flowers.

He wrote to his cousin, in tenderest congratulation, a letter breathing a generous affection, without one selfish thought lurking between the lines.

Her answer came after nearly a month's delay, but, although tardy, it was most delightful to him. Juanita asked him to be Godfather to her boy; and he could easily imagine that this was the highest honour she could offer him.

"In London half the young men I used to meet took a pride in avowing their unbelief," she wrote, "but I know that you are not ashamed to acknowledge your faith in Christ and His Church. I shall feel secure that what you promise for my child will

be fulfilled, so far as it is in your power to bring about its fulfilment. I know that if you stand beside the font and take those vows in His name you will not remember that ceremony as an empty form, a mere concession to usage and respectability. Those promises will appeal to you for my fatherless child in the days to come. They will make you his friend and protector."

He accepted the trust with greater gladness than he had felt about anything that had happened to him for a long time; and on a balmy morning in the last week of May he found himself standing by the font of the old Saxon church at Milbrook where he had heard the solemn words of the Burial Service read above Sir Godfrey Carmichael's coffin less than a year before. He took upon himself the custody of the infant's conscience in all good faith, and he felt that this trust which his cousin had given to him made a new link between them.

The Grenvilles had come down from town to be present at the ceremony, though neither husband nor wife was officially concerned in it. Mrs. Grenville had seized the opportunity to bring Johnnie and Godolphin to Dorsetshire for change of air. She

had an idea that the Purbeck air had a particularly revivifying effect upon them—like unto no other air.

"I suppose that is because it is my native air," she explained.

Mr. Grenville submitted to his nephew's existence as a mysterious dispensation of Providence, which it became him to endure with gentleman-like fortitude, but he did not cease to regard a posthumous infant as a solecism in nature and society.

"Your sister-in-law actually seems pleased with her baby," he told his wife, grumblingly, as he put on a frock coat in honour of the approaching ceremony; "but it appears to me that a woman of refined feeling would be impressed with a sense of incongruity—of indelicacy even—in the idea of a child born such ages after the father's death—a sort of no-man's-baby. And upon my word it is uncommonly hard upon Thomas. With such a family as ours—five and the possibilities of the future—it would have been a grand thing to have one well provided for. As things stand now they must *all* be paupers."

Lord Cheriton was Theodore's fellow-sponsor, and

Lady Jane was Godmother, an office which filled the dear soul with rapture. She held her grandchild throughout the service, except when she delivered him gingerly to the priest, who at one stage of the ceremony, carried the new-made Christian half-way up the aisle, and, as it were, flaunted him in the face of the scanty congregation.

Juanita stood like a statue while these rites were being celebrated, and in her pale set face there was none of the tender interest which a mother might be expected to show upon such an occasion. There was a deep pathos in that marble face and those black garments in an hour which has generally something of a festal aspect. Strangers thought her cold, a proud, hard young woman, thinking more of her own importance, perhaps, than of her baby; yet could they have read beneath the surface they would have pitied the girl-widow in her desolation on this day which should have been blessed to her. She could but think of him who was not there; of the father who had been fated never to look upon his son's face; of the son who was to grow from infancy to manhood without the knowledge of a father's love.

Theodore watched that pale and lovely face, full of sympathy, but not without wonder. How would this new tie affect her? Would it soften all that was hard and vindictive in her mind—would it be strong enough to bring about resignation to the will of Heaven—a patient waiting upon Providence, instead of that feverish eagerness to exact a life for a life?

They two were alone together for only a few minutes after luncheon, strolling along the broad gravel walk in front of the dining-room windows, in the afternoon sunshine, while Lord Cheriton and Mr. Grenville lingered over coffee and cigars, and Lady Jane and her daughter made a domestic group with children and nurses under a gigantic Japanese umbrella. Short as that *tête-à-tête* was it convinced Theodore that the child had not brought oblivion of the father's fate.

"You have heard nothing more—made no new discovery, I suppose," Juanita said, nervously.

"Nothing. Indeed, Juanita, I fear I have no talent as an amateur detective. I am not likely to succeed where Mr. Churton failed. It was easy enough for me to complete the record of the Strang-

ways—to set your suspicions at rest with regard to them. *That* was plain sailing. But it seems to me I shall never go any further."

"I'm afraid you will not," she said, wearily; "and yet I had such hope in your cleverness—your determination to help me. As a lawyer you would know how to set about it. The London detective has many cases—his mind travels from one to another. He has no leisure to think deeply about anything—but you who have had so much leisure of late—you would, I know, be glad to help me."

"Glad! Good God, Juanita, you must know that I would cut off my hand to give you ease or comfort—respite even from a passing trouble. And if you are really set upon this thing—if your peace is really dependent upon the discovery of your husband's murderer——"

"It is, it is, Theodore. I cannot know rest or comfort while his death remains unpunished. I cannot lie down in peace at night while I know that the wretch who killed him is walking about, rejoicing in his wickedness, glad to have destroyed that blameless life, laughing at our feeble love which can let our dead go unavenged."

"If cudgelling these poor brains of mine could bring me any nearer to the truth, Juanita," Theodore said, with a troubled sigh, "I should have helped you better; but so far I can see no ray of light in the thick darkness. I do not think any efforts of ours will solve the mystery. Only some accident, some inconceivable imprudence on the part of the murderer can put us on his track."

And then he thought with horror of Ramsay's idea that a hatred so malignant as that which had killed Godfrey Carmichael might reveal itself in some new crime. He thought of the young mother bending over her infant's cradle in some unguarded room—calm in the fancied safety of her English home. He thought of her wandering alone in park or wood, while that rabid hatred lurked in the shadow, waiting and watching for the moment of attack. The horror of the idea chilled him to the heart, but he was careful not to hint at that horror to Juanita. He seized the first opportunity of being alone with Lady Jane, and imparted his fears, founded upon that suggestion of Cuthbert Ramsay's to her. The kind creature was quick to take alarm, and promised to see that Juanita was guarded at all

hours by all precautions that could be taken without alarming her.

"She is surrounded with old and faithful servants," said Lady Jane, "a hint to them will put them on their guard; but if you thought it wiser I would take her away from this place—take her away from England, if necessary. It is horrible to think of living at the mercy of an unknown foe."

"My friend's notion may be groundless. The crime of last year may have been an isolated act—the inspiration of madness. In our efforts to account for the unaccountable we may invent theories which torture us, and which may yet have no ground in fact. Only it is as well to think of possibilities, however hideous."

He spent one night at the Priory, and before departure next morning, presented his offering of a fine George the Second mug to his godson, Godfrey James Dalbrook—who in his present stage of existence seemed to his Godfather a scarcely distinguishable morsel of humanity smothered in over much cambric and Valenciennes.

"I'm afraid if I were to meet my Godson in the arms of a strange nurse I should not know him,"

he said, deprecatingly, after he had kissed the rose-bud mouth, "but please God the time will come when he and I will be firm friends. As soon as he is old enough to decline *mensa* I shall feel that we can converse upon a common footing, and when he goes to Eton I shall renew my youth every time I run down to waste an hour in the playing fields watching him at cricket, or to drive him to the 'White Hart.'"

Although he put on an air of cheerfulness in his leave-taking, he left the Priory with a sense of deepest anxiety; and it was almost a relief to him when he received a letter from Lady Jane a week afterwards.

"I could not get over the uneasy feeling which your suggestion awakened," she wrote, "so I am going to carry off mother and child to Switzerland the day after to-morrow. Interlaken and Grindelwald are delightful at this season. We shall return to Dorsetshire as soon as the tourists begin to invade our retreat, and I trust in God that some discovery may be made in the meantime, so that all our minds may be more at ease."

## CHAPTER IX.

"Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminate,
That time will come and take my love away.
This thought is as a death, which cannot choose
But weep to have that which it fears to lose."

THAT ghastly idea mooted by Cuthbert Ramsay—the idea of an unsatisfied hatred still hovering like a bird of prey over the heads of Juanita and her child, ready to make its deadly swoop in the hour that should see her most helpless and unprotected—gave a new impetus to Theodore's mind, and he applied himself again to the apparently hopeless endeavour to find the motive of the murder and the person of the murderer.

As an initial step he invited Mr. Churton to dine with him at his chambers, entertained that gentleman with a well-chosen little dinner sent in from a famous tavern in the Strand, and a bottle of unexceptionable port after dinner; and by this innocent means got the detective into an expansive frame of

mind, and induced him to discuss the Cheriton murder in all its bearings.

The result of the long evening's talk differed in hardly any point from the opinion which Mr. Churton had formulated at Cheriton. The motive of the murder must be looked for in some past wrong, or fancied wrong, inflicted upon the murderer. And again Mr. Churton returned to his point that there was a woman at the bottom of it.

"Do you mean that a woman fired the shot?"

"Decidedly not. I mean that a woman was the motive power. Women are not given to avenging their wrongs with their own hands. They will instigate the men who love them to desperate crimes —unconsciously perhaps—for they are the first to howl when the crime has been committed, and the lover's neck is in danger. But jealousy is the most powerful factor of all, and I take it jealousy was at the bottom of the Cheriton crime. I take it that some intrigue of Sir Godfrey's youth was at the root of the matter."

"Strange as you may consider such a belief, Mr. Churton, I am inclined to think that Sir Godfrey's youth was innocent of intrigues—that he never

loved any woman except my cousin, whom he adored from the time he was eighteen, when she was a lovely child of eleven. It was a very romantic attachment, and the kind of attachment which keeps a man clear of low associations."

"You and Lord Cheriton tell me the same story, sir," said the detective, with a touch of impatience; "but if this immaculate young man never injured anybody, how do you account for that bullet?"

"It is unaccountable, except upon a far-fetched hypothesis."

"What may that be?"

"That the act of vengeance—though striking Godfrey Carmichael—was aimed at Lord Cheriton—that the blow was meant to ruin his daughter's life, and by ricochet strike him to the heart. I think we have spoken of this possibility before to-night."

After that evening with Churton, Theodore made up his mind that there was no assistance to be looked for from this quarter. The detective had exhausted his means of investigation, and had nothing further to suggest. He was too practical a man to waste time or thought upon speculative theories. Theodore saw, therefore, that if he were

to pursue the subject further he must think and work for himself.

After considering the question from every possible point of view, he became the more established in the idea that Godfrey Carmichael had been the scapegoat of another man's sin, the vicarious victim whose death was to strike at a guilty life. Of his youth it was easy to know all that there was to be known. He had lived in the sight of his fellow-men, a young man of too much social importance to be able to hide any youthful indiscretions or wrong-doing. But what of that other and so much longer life? What of the early struggles of the self-made man? What of the history of James Dalbrook in those long years of bachelor life in London, when he was slowly working his way to the front? Might not there have been some hidden sin in that life, some sin dark enough to awaken a sleepless vengeance, a malignity which should descend upon him in the day of peace and prosperity like a thunderbolt from a clear and quiet sky?

A man who marries at forty years of age has generally some kind of history before his marriage; and it was in that history Theodore told himself he

must look for the secret of Godfrey Carmichael's death. He was loyal to his kinsman and his friend; he was inspired by no prurient curiosity, no envious inclination to belittle the great man; he was prompted solely by his desire to unearth the hidden foe, and to provide for the safety of Juanita's future life.

Meditating upon his past intercourse with Lord Cheriton, and upon every familiar conversation which he was able to recall, he was surprised to find how very little his kinsman had ever related of his London life, before the time when he took silk and married a rich wife. His allusions to that earlier period had been of the briefest. He had shown none of that egotistical pleasure which most successful men feel in talking of their struggles, and the rosy dawn of fame, those first triumphs, small perhaps in themselves, but the after taste of which is sweeter in the mouth than the larger victories of the flood-tide. He had never talked of any affairs of the heart, any of those lighter flirtations and unfinished romances which elderly men love to recall. His history, so far as it could be judged by his conversation, had been a blank.

Either the man must have been a legal machine, a passionless piece of human clay, caring for nothing but professional achievement, in those eighteen years of manhood between his call to the Bar and his marriage, or he had lived a life which he could not afford to talk about. He was either of a duller clay than his fellow-men, or he had a hidden history.

Now, as it was hardly possible that James Dalbrook, judged from either a psychological or a physiological standpoint, could have been dull and cold, and plodding, and passionless, at any period of his career, there remained the inference that he had a secret history.

Living under the very roof that had sheltered his cousin in the greater part of his professional career, Theodore Dalbrook arrived at this conclusion.

What kind of a life had he lived, that young barrister, briefless and friendless at the outset, whose name was eventually to become a power, a weight bringing down the judicial scale on the side of victory, just as Archer's riding was supposed to secure the winning of a race. How had he lived in those early years, when the fight was all before

him? What friends had he made for himself, and what enemies? What love, or what hate, had agitated his existence?

The investigator could only approach the question in the most common-place manner. It was nearly a quarter of a century since James Dalbrook had been a tenant of that ground-floor set, above which Theodore was pacing up and down in the summer dusk. He had to find some one who remembered him at that time.

It would not be his present laundress, a buxom matron of about five-and-thirty, who had never been known to any present inhabitant of Ferret Court without the encumbrance of a baby in arms, or a baby at the breast. As fast as one baby was disposed of, there was another coming forward to take its place. She always brought her baby with her, and left it about in obscure corners, like an umbrella. It was always of the order of infant designated good; that is to say it was not a squalling baby. There were some of Mrs. Armstrong's clients who suspected her of keeping it in a semi-narcotized condition in the interests of her profession; but when this practice was hinted at the

matron referred to the necessities of teething, and hoped she did not require to be reminded of her duty as a mother.

This good person brought in the lighted lamp while Theodore was pacing up and down the narrow limits of his sitting-room. She placed the lamp on the table, looked inquiringly at her employer, and then retired, only to return with the tea-tray, which she arranged lingeringly. She was a talkative person, with an active intellect, and it irked her to leave the room without any scrap of conversation, were it only an inquiry about the postman, or a casual remark upon the weather.

Nothing being forthcoming from Mr. Dalbrook, she withdrew to the door, but paused upon the threshold and dropped a curtsey.

"I'm afraid we're going to have a storm to-night, sir," she said.

The fear was a thing of the moment, inspired by her desire to talk.

"Do you think so, Mrs. Armstrong?"

"I do, indeed, sir. It couldn't be that 'eavy if there wasn't thunder in the air."

"Perhaps not," replied Theodore, indifferently·

"Ah! by the way, how long have you looked after these chambers?"

"From three years before I was married, sir."

"Is that long?"

"Lor', yes, sir. I should think it was. Why my Joseph was thirteen on his last birthday."

"Let me see; that would mean about seventeen years, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"And I suppose you knew nothing about the chambers before that time."

"I won't say that, sir. I've known them more or less ever since I could run alone. Mother looked after them before me. It was only when the rheumatics took such firm hold of her"—this was said as if Theodore were thoroughly posted in the case—"that mother gave up. She had done for the gentlemen in this house for over twenty years; though when she married father she never thought to have to do such work as this, he being a master carpenter and cabinet maker with a nice business—and she'd been brought up different, and had more education than any of *us* ever had."

"Then your mother must have known this house

when Mr. James Dalbrook had the ground floor—the Mr. Dalbrook who is now Lord Cheriton," said Theodore, cutting short this biographical matter.

"I should think she did, sir. Many's the time I've heard her talk of him. He was just like you, sir, in his ways, as far as I can gather—very quiet and very studious. She waited upon him for nearly twelve years, so she ought to be a judge of his character."

"I should like to have a chat with your mother some of these days, Mrs. Armstrong."

"Would you, sir? I'm sure she'd be delighted. She loves talking over old times. She's none of your Radicals, that are all for changing things, like my husband. She looks up to her superiors, and she feels quite proud of having done for Lord Cheriton when he was just like any other young gentleman in Ferret Court. Any time you'd like to step round to our place, sir, mother would be happy to see you. She'd be glad to wait upon you, but she's crippled with the rheumatics, and it's as much as she can do to get upstairs of a night and downstairs of a morning."

"I'll call upon her to-morrow afternoon, if that will be convenient."

"No fear of that, sir. Shall I look round at four o'clock and show you where she lives, sir? It's not above five minutes' walk."

"If you please. I shall be very much obliged."

Gadbolt's Lane was one of the obscurest alleys between the Temple and St Bride's Church, but it was as well known in the locality as if it had been Regent Street. Thither Mrs. Armstrong conducted her employer on a sultry June afternoon, and admitted him with her own private key into one of the narrowest houses he had ever seen—a house of three stories, with one window in each story, and with a tiny street door squeezed in between the parlour window and the next house—a house which, if it had stood alone, would have been a tower. Upon the narrow street door appeared a wide brass plate inscribed with the name of "J. W. Armstrong, plumber," and in the parlour window were exhibited various indications of the plumbing trade. On a smaller brass plate just below the knocker appeared the modest legend, "Miss Mobley, ladies' own materials made up."

The little parlour behind the plumber's emblems

was very close and stuffy upon this midsummer afternoon, for Mrs. Dugget's complaint necessitated a fire in season and out of season; but it was also spotlessly clean, and preparations had evidently been made for an afternoon tea of an especially delicate character. There was a rack of such thin, dry toast as Mrs. Armstrong's employer affected, and there was a choice pat of Aylesbury butter, set forth upon the whitest of table cloths, and flanked by a glass jar of jam, the glass receptacle being of that ornate character which dazzles the purchaser into comparative indifference as to the quality of the jam; just as admiring man, caught by outward beauty, is apt to shut his eyes to the lack of more lasting charms in the way of temper and character.

"Mother thought perhaps you'd honour her by taking a cup of tea this warm afternoon, sir," said Mrs. Armstrong, when Theodore had seated himself opposite the invalid, "and then you can have your little talk over old times while I look after Armstrong's supper. He'll eat any bit I choose to give him for his dinner, and there's days he don't get no dinner at all, but he always looks for something tasty for supper, don't he, mother?"

Mrs. Dugget acknowledged this trait in her son-in-law's character, and Theodore having graciously accepted her hospitality, Mrs. Armstrong poured out the tea, and waited upon the distinguished guest, and having done this, withdrew to her domestic duties. She was visible in front of the window five minutes afterwards, setting out with a basket over her arm, evidently in quest of the "something tasty" that was needful to her husband's well-being.

"Your daughter tells me that you remember my cousin, Lord Cheriton, when he was Mr. Dalbrook," said Theodore, when he and the old woman were alone together, except for the presence of a very familiar black cat, which pushed its chilly nose into Theodore's hand, and rubbed its sleek fur against Theodore's legs, with an air of slavish adulation.

"It isn't everybody that Tom takes to," said Mrs. Duggett, touched by her favourite's conduct. "He's a rare judge of character, is Tom. I've had him from a kitten, and his mother before him. Yes, sir, I ought to remember his lordship, seeing that I waited upon him for over eleven years; and a quiet gentleman he was to attend upon, giving next to no

trouble, and never using bad language, or coming home the worse for drink, as I've known a gentleman behave in that very set."

"Did he live in his chambers all that time?"

"Well, sir, nominally he did, but actually he didn't. He had his bedroom and his bath-room, just as you have; and the rooms was furnished pretty comfortable, and everything about them was very neat, for he was uncommonly particular, was Mr. Dalbrook; and he was always there of a day, and all day long, except when he was at the law courts, for there never was a more persevering gentleman. But after the first three years I can't say that he *lived* in Ferret Court. He came there by nine or ten o'clock every morning; and sometimes he stayed till ten o'clock at night, and sometimes he left as early as five in the afternoon; but he didn't live there no more after the third year, when he was beginning to get on a bit. There was his rooms, and there was nothing altered, except that he took away his dressing-case and a good many of his clothes; but there was everything left that he wanted for his toilet, and all in apple-pie order for him to fall back upon his old ways at any time. Only, as I said before, he didn't

live there no longer; and instead of having his dinner in his own room at seven o'clock, he never took anything more than a biscuit and a glass of sherry, or a brandy and soda."

"Did this change in his habits come about suddenly?"

"Yes, sir, it did; without an hour's warning. I comes to his rooms one morning and finds that his bed hasn't been slept in, and I finds a little bit of a pencil note from him to say that he would be stopping out of town for a few days. He was away over a fortnight, and from that time to the end of my service in Ferret Court, he never spent another night there."

"He had taken lodgings out of town, I conclude? I suppose you knew his other address?"

"No, sir, he never told me where his home was, for of course he must have had a home somewhere. No man would be a waif and stray for all those years—above all, such a steady-going gentleman as Mr. Dalbrook. I've heard other gentlemen accuse him of being a hermit. 'One never sees you nowhere,' they says. 'You're as steady as Old Time,' they says. And so he

was; but he was very secret with his steadiness."

"Had you any idea where that second home of his was—in what part of the suburbs? It could not have been very far from London, since you say he came to his chambers before ten o'clock every morning."

"It was oftener nine than ten, sir," said Mrs. Dugget.

She paused a little before replying to his question, watching him with a sly smile as he caressed the obtrusive cat. She had her own notions as to the motive of his curiosity. He had expectations from Lord Cheriton, perhaps, and he wanted to discover if there were anything in the background of his kinsman's history which was likely to interfere with the fruition of his mercenary hopes.

"It was a good many years after Mr. Dalbrook left off sleeping at his chambers that I made a sort of discovery," she said; "and I knew my place too well to take any advantage of that discovery. But still I had my suspicions, and I believe they were not far off the truth."

"What was the nature of your discovery?"

"Oh, well, you see, sir, it wasn't much to talk about, only it set me thinking. It was two or three years before Mr. Dalbrook left Ferret Court and went to that first floor set in King's Bench Walk, but he was beginning to be a great man, and he had more work than he could do, slave as hard as he might; and he did slave, I can tell you, sir. His rooms in Ferret Court were very shabby — they hadn't had a bit of paint or a pail of whitewash for I don't know how long, so just before the Long Vacation he says to me, 'I'm going to get these rooms done up, Mrs. Dugget, while I'm out of town. I've got a estimate from a party in Holborn, and he's to paint the wainscot and clear coal the ceiling, and do the whole thing for nine pounds seven and eightpence, in a workmanlike manner. You'll please to clean up after him, and do away with all the waste paper and rubbish, and get everything tidy before November."

Mrs. Dugget paused, and refreshed herself with half a cup of tea, and apologized for the obtrusiveness of the cat.

"I hope you don't object to cats, sir."

Theodore smiled, reflecting that any man who objected to cats would have fled from that stuffy parlour before now.

"No, I am rather fond of them, as an inferior order of dog. Well, now, as to this discovery of yours, Mrs. Dugget?"

"I'm coming to it as fast as I can, sir. You must know that there was a lot of waste paper in one of the closets beside the fireplace, and you are aware how roomy those closets in Ferret Court are. I never held with burning waste paper, first because it's dangerous with regard to fire, and next because they'll give you three shillings a sack for it at some of the paper mills; so I had always emptied the waste paper baskets into this closet, which was made no other use of, and the bottom of the closet was chock-full of old letters, envelopes, pamphlets, and such like. So I took my sack, and I sat down on the floor and filled it. Now, as I was putting in the papers by handfuls—taking my time over it, for the painters wasn't coming till the following Monday, and all my gentlemen was away on their holidays — I was struck by seeing

such a number of envelopes addressed to the same name—

J. Danvers, Esq.,
Myrtle Cottage,
Camberwell Grove.

How did Mr. Dalbrook come to have all those envelopes belonging to Mr. Danvers? There must have been letters inside the envelopes, and what business had he with Mr. Danvers' letters?"

"They may have been letters bearing upon some case on which he was engaged," said Theodore.

"So they might, sir, but would *he* have the letters?" asked the laundress shrewdly. "Wouldn't that be the solicitor's business?"

"You are right, Mrs. Dugget. I see you have profited by your experience in the Temple."

"I had the curiosity to look at the post-marks on those envelopes, sir. There was over a hundred of 'em, I should think, some whole, and some torn across, and the post-marks told me that they spread over years. They most of 'em looked like tradesmen's envelopes, and the Camberwell post-mark was on a good many of 'em. That closet hadn't been

cleared out for eight or nine years, to my knowledge, and those envelopes went back for the best part of that time, and the longer I looked at them the more I wondered who Mr. Danvers was."

"And did you come to any conclusion at last?"

"Well, sir, I had my own idea about it, but it isn't my place to say what that idea was."

"Come, come, Mrs. Dugget, you have no employer now, and you are beholden to no one. You are a free agent, and have a perfect right to give expression to your opinion."

"If I thought it would go no further, sir."

"It shall go no further."

"Very well then, sir, to be candid I thought that James Dalbrook and J. Danvers, Esq., were the same person, and that Mr. Dalbrook had been living in Camberwell Grove under an assumed name."

"Would not that seem a very curious thing for a professional man in Mr. Dalbrook's position to do?" inquired Theodore, gravely.

"It might seem curious to you, sir, but I've seen a good deal of professional gentlemen in my time, and it didn't strike me as very uncommon. Gentle-

men have their own reasons for what they do, and the more particular they are from a professional point of view the more convenient they may find it to make a little alteration in their names now and again."

Mrs. Dugget looked at him with a significant shrewdness, which gave her the air of a female Mephistopheles, a creature deeply versed in all things evil.

"Did your curiosity prompt you to try and verify your suspicions?" he asked.

The old woman looked at him searchingly before she answered, as if trying to discover what value there might be for him in any information she had it in her power to give or to withhold. So far she had been carried along by her inherent love of gossip, stimulated by the wish to stand well with her daughter's employer, and perhaps with a view to such small amenities as a pound of tea or a bottle of whisky. But at this point something in Theodore's earnest manner suggested to her that her knowledge of his kinsman's life might have a marketable value, and she therefore became newly reticent.

"It doesn't become me to talk about a gentle-

man like Mr. Dalbrook, your namesake and blood relation, too, sir,'' she said, folding her rheumatic hands meekly. "I'm afraid I've made too free with my tongue already."

Theodore did not answer her immediately. He took a letter-case from his breast-pocket, and slowly and deliberately extracted two crisp bank-notes from one of the divisions. These he opened and spread calmly and carefully on the table, smoothing out their crisp freshness, which crackled under his hand.

There is something very pleasant in the aspect of a new bank-note; money created expressly, as it were, for the first owner; virgin wealth, pure and uncontaminated by the dealings of the multitude. These were only five-pound notes, it is true, the lowest in the scale of English paper-money—in the eye of a millionaire infinitesimal as the grains of sand on the sea-shore—yet to Mrs. Dugget those two notes lying on the table in front of her suggested vast wealth. It is doubtful if she had ever seen two notes together in the whole of her previous experience. Her largest payment was a quarter's rent, her largest receipt had been a quarter's wages.

She had managed to save a little money in the course of her laborious days, but her savings had been accumulated in sovereigns and half-sovereigns, which had been promptly transferred to the savings bank. Bank-notes to her mind were the symbols of surplus wealth.

"Now, I am not going to beat about the bush, Mrs. Dugget," said Theodore, with a matter-of-fact air. "I have a great respect for my kinsman, Lord Cheriton, who has been a kind friend to me. You may be assured, therefore, that if I am curious about his past life, I mean him no harm. I have reasons of my own, which it is not convenient for me to explain, for wanting to know all about his early struggles, his friends, and his enemies. I feel perfectly sure that you followed up your discovery of those envelopes—that you took the trouble to find Myrtle Cottage, and to ascertain the kind of people who lived there." Her face told him that he was right. "If you choose to be frank with me, and tell me all you can, those two five-pound notes are very much at your service. If you prefer to hold your tongue, I can only wish you good afternoon, and try to make my discoveries unaided, which

will not be very easy after a lapse of over twenty years."

"I don't want to keep any useful information from you, sir, provided you'll promise not to let anything I may tell you get to Lady Cheriton's ears. I shouldn't like to make unhappiness between man and wife."

"I promise that Lady Cheriton shall not be made unhappy by any indiscretion of mine."

"That's all I care about, sir," said Mrs. Dugget, piously, with her keen old eye upon the notes, "and being sure of that, I don't mind owning that I did take the trouble to follow up the address upon the envelope. Now, when a gentleman like Mr. Dalbrook — a gentleman as always pays his way regular, and stands high in his profession—when such a gentleman as that changes his name, you may be sure there's a lady in the case. If you take up a paper, sir, and happen to glance at a divorce case, promiscuous, as I do sometimes when my son-in-law leaves his *Telegraph* or his *Echo* lying about —you'll find that the gentleman who runs away with the lady always changes his name first thing— whether he and the lady go to an hotel, or takes

lodgings, or go on the Continent—he always takes another name. I don't think the change does him much good, for wherever he goes people seem to know all about him, and come out with their knowledge in court directly it's wanted — but it seems as if he must always act so, and act so he does."

Theodore submitted to this disquisition in silence, but he touched the notes lightly with his fingers and made them crackle, by way of stimulus to Mrs. Dugget's intellect.

"I felt sure if Mr. Dalbrook had been living at Myrtle Cottage under the name of Danvers there was a lady mixed up in it, and, being in the Long Vacation, when I knew he generally went abroad, I thought I would try and satisfy myself about him. I thought I should feel more comfortable in waiting upon him when I knew the worst. And then Camberwell Grove was such a little way off. It would be just a nice outing for me of a summer evening; so what did I do one lovely warm afternoon but take my tea a little earlier than usual, and trot off to the corner of Lancaster Place, where I wait for a Waterloo 'bus coming sauntering along the Strand

as if time was made for slaves, and there was no such things as loop-lines or trains to be caught. I hadn't no train to catch, so I didn't mind the sauntering and the dawdling and the taking up and setting down. I had all the summer evening before me when I got out at the Green and made my way to the Grove. It's a beautiful romantic place, Camberwell Grove, sir. I don't know whether you know it, but if you do I'm sure you'll own that there ain't a prettier neighbourhood near London. Twenty years ago they used still to show you the garden where George Barnwell murdered his uncle, but a daresay that's been done away with by now. It took me a good time to find Myrtle Cottage, for it was one of the smallest houses in the Grove, and it stood back in a pretty little garden, and there was nothing on the gate to tell if it was Myrtle or otherwise. But I did find it at last, thanks to a young housemaid who was standing at the gate, talking to a grocer's lad. The grocer's lad made off when he saw me, and for the first few minutes the girl was inclined to be disagreeable; but she came round very quickly, and I daresay she was glad to have some one to talk to on that solitary summer evening.

'Cook's out for her holiday,' she says, 'and I can't stop in the house alone.' And then we got talking, and after we'd talked a bit standing at the gate, she asked me into the garden, where there was a long narrow grass plot, screened off from the high road by two horse-chestnut trees and some laburnums, and there was some garden chairs and a table on the grass, and the young woman asked me to sit down. She'd got her work-basket out there, and she'd been making herself an apron. 'I can't bear the house of a summer evening,' she says, 'it gives me the horrors.' Well, we talked of her master and mistress, as was natural. She'd lived with them over a twelvemonth, and it was a pretty good place, but very dull, and the missus had a temper, and was dreadfully particular, and expected things as nice as if she had ten servants instead of two, and was very mean into the bargain, and seemed afraid of spending money. 'I shouldn't be so particular, if I was her,' the girl said, and then she told me that she knew things wasn't all right, though they seemed a very respectable couple, and the lady went to church regularly."

"What made her suspect that things were

wrong?" asked Theodore, Mrs. Dugget having paused at this point of her narrative.

"Oh, sir, servants always know. They can't live six months in a house without finding out how the land lies. They've got so little to think of, you see, except their masters and mistresses. You can't wonder if they're always on the watch and the listen, meaning no harm, poor things. If you was shut up in a stuffy little kitchen all day, never seeing no one but the lads from the tradespeople for two or three minutes at a time, you'd watch and you'd listen. It's human nature. People don't like reading servants, and they don't like gadding servants; so they must put up with servants that think a good deal of what's going on round them. The housemaid told me she was sure from the solitary way Mr. and Mrs. Danvers lived that there was a screw loose somewhere. 'No one never comes near them,' she said, 'and she never goes nowhere except for a walk with him. No visitors, no friends. I can't think how she bears her life. She hasn't a party-gown, even. If anybody asked her to a party she couldn't go. When he took her abroad last month she was all in a fluster and excitement, just like a child, or like a

prisoner that's going to be let out of prison. She shook hands with cook and me when she said good-bye, and that isn't like her. "I feel so happy, Jane," she says, "I don't know what I'm doing." No more I think she did. She looked quite wild with pleasure, and quite young too in her new bonnet, although in a general way she looks older than him.' And then the girl told me how fond she was of him, although she showed her temper now and then, even to him. Not often, the girl said, and any quarrel with him threw her into a dreadful way afterwards, and she would lie awake and sob all night long. The girl had heard her, for it was a trumpery little house, though it was pretty to look at, and the walls were very thin. I could see with my own eyes that it wasn't much of a house, a sort of dressed-up cottage, smothered with creepers up to the roof. It looked pretty and countrified after the Temple, and I could understand that Mr. Dalbrook liked living in such a lovely place as Camberwell Grove."

"Did you find out what the lady was like?" asked Theodore.

"You may be sure I tried to do that, sir. How could I help being interested in a lady that had such

an influence over one of my gentlemen? The girl told me that Mrs. Danvers was one of the 'has beens.' She had been handsome, perhaps, once upon a time; and she might have had a fine figure once upon a time; but she had neither face nor figure now. She was pale and careworn, and she was very thin. She didn't do anything to set herself off either, like other ladies of five-and-thirty. She wore the same merino gown month after month, and she had only one silk gown in her wardrobe. She was always neat and nice, like a lady; but she didn't seem to care much how she looked. She told the girl once that she and Mr. Danvers would be better off by and by, and then all things would be different with them. 'I am only waiting for those happier days,' she says; but the girl fancied she would be an old woman before those days came."

"Were there any children?"

"I could not find out for certain. The girl fancied from chance words she had overheard that there had been a baby, but that it had been sent away, and that this was a grievance between them, and came up when they quarrelled, which was not often, as I said before. Altogether I left Camber-

well Grove feeling very sorry for the lady who was called Mrs. Danvers, and I thought it was a great pity if Mr. Dalbrook wanted to make a home for himself he couldn't have managed it better. I made great friends with Jane, the housemaid, before I left that garden, and I asked her when she had an evening out to come and take a cup of tea with me; and if she could get leave to go to the theatre, my youngest son, who was living at home then, could take her, along with my daughter, who was then unmarried and in service in New Bridge Street. The young woman came once, about Christmas time, and she told me things were just the same as they had been at Myrtle Cottage. She talked very freely about Mr. and Mrs. Danvers over her tea, but she had no idea that he was beknown to me, or that he was a barrister with chambers in the Temple. She thought he was something in the City. I asked her if it was Mr. Danvers who was mean and kept his lady short of money; but she thought not. She thought it was Mrs. Danvers that had a kind of mania for saving, for she was quite put out if Mr. Danvers brought her home a present that cost a few pounds. It seemed as if they were saving up for

some purpose—for they used to talk to each other of the money he was putting by, and it was plain they were looking forward to a better house and a happier kind of life. Jane thought that either she had a husband hidden away somewhere—in a lunatic asylum, perhaps—or he had another wife."

Mrs. Dugget stopped to replenish the thrifty little fire with a very small scoopful of coals, during which operation the sleek black cat leaped upon her back and balanced himself upon her shoulders while she bent over the grate.

"Well, sir, that was Jane's first and last visit. She got married all of a sudden before Lady-day, and she went to live in the country, where her husband was postman in her native village, and I never see no more of her. I went to Camberwell Grove again in the Long Vacation, when I knew Mr. Dalbrook was away, but I found only an old woman in the house as caretaker, stone deaf, and disagreeable into the bargain. Mr. Dalbrook moved into King's Bench Walk the following year, and less than six months after that I saw his marriage in the papers; and his clerk told me he had married a very rich young lady, and was going to buy an estate in the

country. I went to have another look at the cottage soon after Mr. Dalbrook's marriage, and I found the garden-gate locked, and a board up to say that the house was to be let unfurnished; and that, sir, is all I could ever find out about the lady called Mrs. Danvers."

"And this history of the home in Camberwell Grove is all you ever knew about Mr. James Dalbrook's life outside the chambers in Ferret Court."

"Yes, sir, that is all I ever heard, promiscuously or otherwise."

"Well, Mrs. Dugget, you have been frank with me, and you have earned my little present," said Theodore, handing her the two notes, which her old fingers touched tremulously in a rapture that was too much for words. It was with an effort that she faltered out her thanks for his generosity, which, she protested, she had never "looked for."

Theodore walked back towards the Temple deep in thought; indeed so troubled and perplexed were his thoughts that upon approaching Ferret Court he stopped short, and instead of going straight to his chambers turned aside and went to the Gardens, where he walked up and down the same gravel path

for an hour, pondering upon that picture of the hidden home in Camberwell Grove, conjured up before him by the loquacious laundress. Yes, he could imagine that obscure existence almost as if he had seen it with his bodily eyes. He could fancy the solitary home where never kinsman or familiar friend crossed the threshold; a home destitute of all home ties and homely associations; a home never smiled upon by the parson of the parish; cut off from all local interests, identified with nothing, a mystery among the common-place dwellings around and about it; a subject for furtive observation from the neighbours. He could fancy those two lonely lives preying upon each other, too closely united for peaceful union; the woman too utterly dependent upon the man; she feeling her dependence a degradation; he feeling her helplessness a burden. He could picture them, loving each other, perhaps, passionately, jealously to the last, and yet weary of each other, worn out and weighed down by the narrowness of a life walled off from the rest of the world and all its changeful interests and widening sympathies. And then he saw the picture in still darker colours, as it might have been ere that un-

known figure faded from the canvas. He thought of the ambitious, successful barrister, heart-sick at the fetters which he had fastened upon his life, tired of his faded mistress, seeing all gates open to him were he but free to pass them ; still living apart from the world, at a time of life when all the social instincts are at their highest development, when a man loves the society of his fellowmen, the friction of crowds, the sound of his own voice, and every social tribute that the world can offer to his talents and his success. He saw his kinsman galled by the chain which love and honour had hung about him, loathing his bondage, longing for liberty—saw him with the possibility of a brilliant marriage suddenly offering itself to him, a lovely girl ready to throw herself into his arms, a fortune at his feet, and the keen ambition of a self-made man goading him like a spur. How did it end? Did death set him free—death, the loosoner of all bonds? Or did his mistress sacrifice herself and her broken heart to his welfare, and of her own accord release him? There are women capable of such sacrifices. It would seem that his disentanglement, however it came about, had been perfect of its

kind; for no rumour of a youthful intrigue, no scandal about a cast-off mistress had ever clouded the married life of James Dalbrook. Even in Cheriton village, where the very smallest nucleus in the way of fact was apt to swell into a gigantic scandal, even at Cheriton nobody had ever hinted at indiscretions in the earlier years of the local magnate.

And then Theodore Dalbrook asked himself the essential question: What bearing, if any, had this episode of his kinsman's life upon the murder of Juanita's husband? What dark and vengeful figure lurked in the background of that common story of dishonourable love? An outraged husband, a brother, a father? That obscure life apart from friends and acquaintances would show that some great wrong had been done, some sacred tie had been broken. Only a sinful union so hides its furtive happiness—only a deep sense of degradation will reconcile a woman to banishment from the society of her own sex.

Whether that forsaken mistress were dead or living there might lurk in her sad history the elements of tragedy, the motive for a ghastly revenge;

and on this account the story possessed a grim fascination for Theodore Dalbrook. He lay awake the greater part of the night thinking in a fitful way of that illicit ménage in the unfashionable suburb—the suburb whose very existence is unknown to society. He fell asleep long after the sun was up, only to dream confusedly of a strange woman who was now James Dalbrook's lawful wife—and now his victim—and whose face had vague resemblances to other faces, and who was and was not half-a-dozen other women in succession.

He walked to Camberwell on the following afternoon, surprised at the strange world through which he passed on his way there, the teeming, busy, noisy world—the world which makes such a hard fight for life. The Grove itself, after that bustling, seething road, seemed a place in which nightingales might have warbled, and laughing girls hidden from their lovers in the summer dusk. The very atmosphere of decay from a better state was soothing. There were trees still, and gardens, and here and there pretty, old-fashioned houses; and in a long narrow garden between two larger houses he found Myrtle Cottage. There was a board up, and the

neglected garden indicated that the cottage had been a long time without a tenant.

There was a policeman's wife living in it, with a colony of small children, in the cotton-pinafore stage of existence, and with noses dependent upon maternal supervision, so much so that scarcely had the matron attended to one small snub than her attention was called off to another, which gave a distracted air to all her conversation.

She took Mr. Dalbrook over the house, and expatiated upon the damp walls, and the utter incompetence of the cistern and pipes to meet the exigencies of a family, which was the more to be regretted on the ground that the landlord declined to do anything in the way of repairs, as he intended to pull the house down in a few years with a view to making better use of the ground.

"And indeed that's about all it's fit for," said the policeman's wife. "It ain't fit for anybody to *live* in."

The rooms had even a more desolate look than rooms in empty houses usually have, in consequence of this long neglect. The cottage had been empty for two years and a half, long enough for the

damp to make hideous blotches upon all the walls, and trace discoloured maps of imaginary continents upon all the ceilings; long enough for the spiders to weave their webs in all the corners, for rust to eat deep into the iron grates, and for dust and dirt to obscure every window.

Theodore stood in the room which had once been a drawing-room, and which boasted of a wide French window looking out upon a lawn, with a large weeping-ash directly in front of the window, and much too near for airiness or health, a melancholy-looking tree in which Theodore thought Mrs. Danvers might have found a symbol of her own life, as she stood at the window and looked at those dull drooping branches against a background of ivy-covered wall.

END OF VOL. II.

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